

Literature course features female authors

By Kylee Hahn

A new course taught by Mrs. Cathy Pearlman this year, Women’s Voices in Literature, offers literature composed strictly by female writers.

Mrs. Pearlman’s lineup of books include *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, and a story yet to be determined by either Maya Angelou or Anne Moody.

Mrs. Pearlman attended St. Mary’s in Notre Dame, Indiana, an all-female college, where she was surrounded by strong female students and professors.

Although this was an all-female college, the curriculum included a lot of traditional male canon texts.

“I realized I wanted my students to have more diverse voices and potential for connection,” said Mrs. Pearlman.

Mrs. Pearlman said there were only three or four female authors in Durant’s curriculum, and since teaching here, she has brought in several more, including Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*.

Usually there are more females in English teaching positions, but Durant is different with two males and one female.

She thinks a male could most definitely teach the curriculum in Women’s

Voices in Literature, but it would present several challenges from a standpoint of experience and perspective.

“I think I can speak from a more authentic place with my experiences as an Asian-American female,” said Mrs. Pearlman.

Mrs. Pearlman has received a positive reaction to this course but thinks there may have been a misconception that this class is only for females.

“It is important that students understand the connections between what we read, what characters experience, and an author’s perspective; then translate that to what we do, what we experience, and how we perceive life,” said Mrs. Pearlman.

Unlike other English classes, Women’s Voices in Literature often centers around issues of women’s equality.

“We have more discussions about feminism in the Women’s Voices class than I do in other classes,” she said. “We frame many of our discussions around questions of equality and fair treatment based on gender.”

Currently there are 22 students in this course for both semesters, including three males.

Zoey Rote, a sophomore, immediately put this class on her schedule, and it is now a class she looks forward to going to

every other day.

“We don’t really get to see the woman’s side of things in most stories, so this class really helps with that,” said Rote. She took this class wanting to learn more about women’s points of view in society.

“I think this class definitely gives people a better view that most other English classes wouldn’t have,” said Rote.

A sophomore, Kila Wink, said that she thinks this class seemed more interesting than the other English courses, and it caught her attention when making her schedule because it was a new course.

“Mrs. Pearlman is a good teacher that makes the topics more interesting,” said Wink.

Junior Jordon Kirchner took it in an effort to open his eyes more to women authors. Kirchner said Mrs. Pearlman does a great job including authors that most of the students weren’t familiar with.

“Mrs. Pearlman told me to look into taking the class, so I could be introduced to some new names of authors,” said Kirchner.

Kirchner isn’t hesitant to speak his opinion in class considering he’s a male in a Women’s Voices class.

“No matter what exactly we say, it’s always listened to and even if some people don’t agree, it hasn’t turned into an argu-



Photo by Nic Poston
Mrs. Pearlman teaches her Women’s Voices in Literature class.

ment,” said Kirchner.

Kirchner is excited for the rest of the year and is looking forward to seeing what other books Mrs. Pearlman will teach.

Fans follow former teacher’s monster-themed art



Former Durant art teacher Mr. Chris McMahon works at Best Buy in Iowa City.

By Grace Paustian

Former Durant art teacher Chris McMahon still has fans who follow his unique style of monster-themed art.

While teaching at Durant, Mr. McMahon became famous for an album cover he did for the band Weezer. Looking for artwork for its album *Everything Will Be Alright in the End*, the band contacted Mr. McMahon in 2014 about a painting he had done three years before.

“The lead singer had already found my art and wanted to purchase the rights to one particular painting, which I agreed to,” he said. “The album was released later that year.”

The painting featured a four-legged hairy monster with sharp teeth. Mr. McMahon’s album cover even appeared on Jimmy Fallon’s *The Tonight Show* and attracted a number of fans.

He still does a lot of commissions for people all around the world who are interested in having him add his monsters to their already-finished paintings.

“I’ve dropped weird monsters into around 150 secondhand landscape paintings and will probably keep at it for the foreseeable future,” he said.

“I’ve sent to and/or received paintings from all over the country, Canada, Sweden, Germany, England, France, and Australia. I’ve lost track. It’s humbling to realize that work I’ve done has traveled around the planet.”

He said his inspiration for his paintings were monster movies he has watched, especially Godzilla.

“I love the concept of creatures so large they’re intimidating, even if they don’t fit the image of the typical scary monster,” he said.

“Clifford the Big Red Dog was cute, but the amount of city infrastructure he would have destroyed just by going for a walk would have gotten him banned from the island.”

Mr. McMahon has recently done an album cover for a Canadian band that hasn’t been released yet.

Mr. McMahon was the 7-12 art teacher at Durant for 13 years, stepping down in May of 2021.

Mr. McMahon is no longer teaching, though he said under the right conditions he may start teaching again. He currently works at Best Buy in Iowa City.

“I’ve always been into technology, so it seemed like something that would fit as a day job,” said Mr. McMahon.

His fans can find him on social media, including his website www.cwmcmahon.com.

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“There were always people around,” said Grace, who is the mother of two children with her husband Austin Finnegan. “We learned from a very young age how to communicate with anyone: salesmen, grieving families, florists, pastors, etc. I value my ability to converse with many different people.”

Anna said she and her siblings were well versed in funeral etiquette and had to be quiet during services, and Will said he learned a valuable lesson about compassion.

“I think the main thing that you could learn from living in that environment is that one of the most compassionate things you can do in life is comfort those who are grieving,” said Will.

Grief is a part of everyone’s life, and everyone will experience it at some point.

Learning to cope with the grief of losing someone close to you is the hardest part, and the Bentley children understand that better than anyone.

“I always knew there were grieving people at our house, but I never fully understood that process until the first time we had a family friend pass away,” said Anna.

“I was more aware of grief growing up, but I also think I didn’t take grief as seriously because death was always a topic of conversation at my house,” said Grace.

For Will, living in a funeral home caused him to confront his own thoughts about death early on.

“Personally, I just accepted it as a natural part of life,” he explained.

“Sometimes it felt that being exposed to that thought process early on in life made me more numb to it in reaction to death around me, but as life’s gone on, that’s changed.”

Because of a funeral home’s reputation, the Bentley children enjoyed the surprised reaction of people who learned where they lived.

“When people find out what my dad did for work, there was almost always a double take and a sort of queasy facial reaction that follows with, ‘I don’t know how anyone could do that,’” said Will.

Acquaintances coming to the funeral home would be slightly put off and uneasy, but it would soon become normal to them too.

“Many people’s first response was something like, ‘Isn’t it scary living with dead people?’ My siblings and I always laughed at that one,” said Grace.

“One thing I remember was our babysitters being slightly put off by us living in the funeral home, but after a time or two, they didn’t see the big deal either.”

Anna was fortunate to grow up with

most of her friends, so by the time they understood what a funeral home really was, it didn’t seem that strange.

“I’d always make jokes that people were hesitant to accept sleepover invites, but that mostly wasn’t true,” said Anna.

“Now in the adult world, people are curious about the experiences I had at the funeral home and want to know how that all worked as a business and a living space.”

Now that the Bentley kids are all grown up, leading their own lives and careers, they find that their intended career paths may have been shaped from their experiences growing up in the funeral home.

Grace is an elementary school teacher in Wilton, and Anna is a sixth-grade teacher at Aldrich Elementary in Cedar Falls.

Will is a worship and production coordinator at Prairie Lakes Church in Grinnell. He is also working toward getting a Master of Divinity from Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, Indiana, and wants to continue his career in the ministry.

“I chose to become a teacher because I wanted to help people,” said Grace. “I grew up seeing my dad help so many families and people during really difficult times. I knew I wanted to be able to impact the lives of others as well.”

Anna was in her senior year before she knew what she wanted her career

to be. She got to spend time in a first-grade classroom and help out during her study hall period. That was the first time she had considered teaching as a career path.

As she went through the teaching program at the University of Northern Iowa, she noticed firsthand the importance of teachers and knew that is what she would be.

“I’ve taught in the upper elementary grades for going on six years now, and I have loved building relationships with students and making a true impact,” said Anna. “I think seeing our dad’s dedication to serving others helped drive all of us kids to a life serving and impacting our communities.”

Will made the decision to pursue ministry because he found it to be the way that he can use the gifts God has given him to make the greatest impact in the lives of those around him.

“If there was a way that living in the funeral home impacted my career choice, it’d be this: witnessing death’s effect around you leaves you with a great deal of questions. After all those years in that environment, I’ve found Jesus is the answer,” said Will.

“I’m pursuing Him and His purpose for my life, because without Jesus, grief is how everything ends. But with Him, there’s always hope in a future that’s greater than we could ever imagine.”