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English FSU

Creative Writing Professor shares success.

-Jerome Bass

Much attention has been brought to the English department recently when Creative Writing professor Sarah Gerkenmeyer landed the Autumn House fiction prize this fall. As one of many active writers within the department, Gerkenmeyer sheds some light on her current success and shares some advice for aspiring writers.

Gerkenmeyer's short fiction collection *What You Are Now Enjoying* won her a variety of prizes, most prominent among them being publication. On top of having her book published, she will be given a cash prize among other financial backing

for her upcoming collection. Many writers would stop there after enjoying the success and high that must come with publication; Not Gerkenmeyer. While speaking with her, it became clear that she enjoys both the growth of her career, as well as sharing it with others.

"It's exciting to be a part of this broadcast, not just for my book and my own work, but to draw attention to the other people here and the work people are doing here." The bio on the back of the book is not the only means of spreading the word of Gerkenmeyers' ties to the University.



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New Professors Join Department

The Creative Writing department has added two professors to the minor. The department welcomes Professor Jose Alvergue and Professor Schwab and is excited for the new addition to the growing minor. Since the addition of the minor in 2008, Creative Writing has grown to be an incredibly competitive minor to get into, and a rapidly growing one at that. The addition is the biggest move the department has made so far to improve the minor, and is expectedly the first of many.

With the publication of the collection comes promotion of the collection. Gerkenmeyer has the liberty to choose how to promote her work, and has chosen a means that may be familiar to creative writing students on campus.

The English department has put a lot of time and effort into the Visiting Writing series on campus, and sees it as an important way to share real-world knowledge with creative writing students. Gerkenmeyer plans on traveling to other campuses and taking part in their visiting writers programs similar to our own. This selection of promotion is a win-win-win scenario. Through this promotion not only will the department's name be linked with Gerkenmeyer, bringing attention to both her and the department, but the students of those selected campuses will gain knowledge of writing and getting published in life beyond education.

Her visits to other college campus-

will offer the students there advice as to what to do and what not to do as a professional writer. However, she shares some advice to our students by emphasizing the importance of persistence while seeking publication. "Don't get overwhelmed," Gerkenmeyer says. "Try not to listen too much to rejection. When it comes to submitting to journals, the thicker the stack of rejection slips is, the more work you're doing." She makes it clear that rejection slips are a good thing in a certain way. Most journals take only a very small percentage of submissions, so rejection is common. As a creative writing student myself, it's refreshing to hear that failure is a good thing, and that it can be seen as a second chance rather than an ending point. Gerkenmeyer's *What You Are Now Enjoying* is in the production process now and will be seen in stores Feb. 15, 2015. Her travels to other schools and local establishments will start within the year, and

on behalf of the English Department I applaud her persistence and success, and wish her the best of luck.



Roorbach shares his craft with FSU

-Lizzie Reid

Bill Roorbach's advice to beginning writers is to work a job as a ground attendant for an airline. He says there is no such thing as a general setting and we should begin in the middle of things. During his visit to Fredonia he spoke to a room full with rapt students and faculty, curious attendees, and those who simply had to be there. Wherever one falls, if you had been present you would have been unexpectedly charmed and continually interested.

Bill Roorbach is a man who specializes in graceful, meander-

ing tangents. He spoke in pauses, tossed books into the air nervously, and pulled out all of his bookmarks in his excitement to impart something valuable to us. And despite his seemingly scattered demeanor, many things of value were communicated. He told us a

story concerning one of his students: a blind student who transposed stories using a "Type 'n' Speak" into braille. This student would read aloud from large sheet of braille,

his fingers passing over the embossed paper dots, reading far ahead of his fingers. As Roorbach illustrated this to us, his eyes closed, hands running over imaginary sheets of paper, he asked us

"There is no such thing as a general setting.

We should begin in the middle of things."

-Bill Roorbach

WRITERS WANTED:

Are you a writer?

The English Department Newsletter could use your help. We're looking for journalistic contributions for our next issue. This opportunity could help expand your writing experience, strengthen your writing skills, and contribute to your resume.

Contact Jerome Bass at Bass3735@Fredonia.edu

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Slam Poet Visits FSU

-Alyssa Velk

Rachel McKibbens was a joy to see live. She had wonderful stage presence and her work is even more powerful and emotional when read aloud than in the text of her book. It was really helpful to gain insight into Rachel's background from herself first hand. As I was reading her poems to prepare for her visit, I remembered thinking...is this all real? Did these things really happen to her? That's so crazy! I think it was a little daunting to me to find out that all of these things were in fact very real, first-hand, from the source.

She told us about how she worked at a mental institution, had been abused terribly by her father, struggled with a gender identity crisis as a small child, was bipolar, and grown up with a mother who did not want her. Yet I still think she turned out to be a really awesome person, and I really was appreciative of the fact that she said that she doesn't drink, smoke, and has never done drugs which takes a high level of commitment and willpower. That shows that she saw how terrible her father was and chose to never let herself get that way. It is always good to see people who learn from other's wrongdoings of the past.

During the craft talk McKibbens said that when she was young she was very into fantastical and escapist writing. We see this in her poems, in par-

ticular the one titled "Tomboy" from her collection *Pink Elephant*. She was also heavily influenced by cinema and imagery. This holds very true in both her work and in her performance. When she was reading the poem "The Last Time" her background in theater really made itself evident. The words on the page alone make the reader shiver when they realize the situation, she has finally decided to stand up to her father and remove herself from her terrible circumstances. However, when McKibbens was reading the audience could just sense all the emotion that was behind it. Especially at the end when she held up the 'invisible hammer,' closed her eyes as if she was taking herself back into that moment to really show us how she felt at the time it actually happened. She then barely whispered the last line of the poem, "If you ever touch us again, I will kill you."

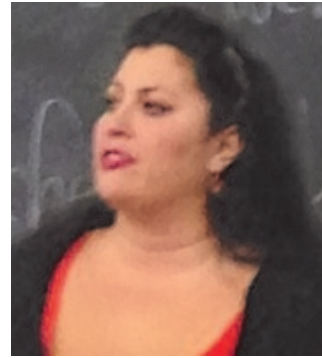
The thing that helped me most with seeing this brilliant woman and learning about craft from her methods and madness was the activity we did during her craft talk. It was extremely helpful for me to see this method in action. A writer begins with a simple word. I believe we used 'bride,' for the subject of what they are about to write and then branched off in any way possible about this idea. This

brain-storming process really gets the ball rolling and helps a writer think of and explore avenues that they had never even thought of before because of this mapping process.

It was interesting that she said that usually when she writes poems they can start in some general standard form of poetry, but then she will mess with them so much that it will not follow any of the rules and guidelines of the started form once she is done. This 'different' way of structure really stood out to me, both when I read the book and when the author herself read the poems aloud, with the poem "The Day After The First Time We Ran Away From Home" because it is just one long sentence, which McKibbens said was to mimic the heartbeat at the time the actual event happened that she talks about in the poem. This shows how she used all of her knowledge of real life, cinematic moments, and writing style in order to really set the mood, tone, and voice for the piece.

McKibbens says that writers do not have to defend every single move they make in their writing. She does not

allow herself to be restrained between what is real and what is not in her work. She has moments of fiction and moments of reality, and it all meshes together to form this one big crazy story. She tells us that for her, a poem is not a poem until she finds the voice to give it. "My poems are people; they're children of mine." This really emulates how committed to her work she is, and I am very glad that she was not afraid to share her 'children' with us.



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to consider what reading really is, what a book really is. As a writer of both non-fiction and fiction, he offered diverse perspectives on theories of writing, from reality as well as fabrication—he brought forth the issues between the relationship of experiential truth and the virtue of alteration, story-truth. *Temple Stream*, a non-fiction account of his relationship and life surrounding a local stream from his home in main, is spoken in his own voice, the character Bill Roorbach. His short-story collection *Big Bend* is written with many voices—a testament to his ability for the formulation of complex characters.

In his craft talk, he had students partake in an exercise that focused on "person, place, and object" to simply come up with one for each category. Going around the lecture hall, asking volunteers for their own examples, he would pause on some of the words offered up: a letter, vanilla candles, a ring. For each he would expand on a potential resonance for each, a story unfolding from one single word. His interest in the

broader story is illustrated in his own writing, and he impressed on us students the importance of developing our love for the little things, the intimate pieces of narratives that make them human. In all of his tangential ways he seemed lost at first, and then would finish suddenly, precipitously bringing all thoughts together, and polishing off some nugget he meant to get to the entire time.

The reading was full for a lecture hall on a Thursday evening. Apparently there was sharp increase of sales for Roorbach in the school store after his visit. This comes as no surprise. He read from his newest novel, *Life among Giants*. He read standing upright, no microphone, holding the book outward at the level of his face. He spoke with animation and finesse; if he did trip over a phrase he would regain composure quickly, weaving the slight of speak into the narration as if it was meant to be there. He read for at least fifteen minutes, maybe longer, it's hard to say since the sense of time was lost in en-

-grossment, listening to him speak from the novel. Looking around, students were leaning forward in their seats. Aside from Roorbach's clear voice there was a full silence, the sound of undivided attention.

If you haven't read any of Roorbach's work, whether fiction or non, you ought to. And if you missed the craft talk and the reading you missed Bill Roorbach, a remarkable, charming man who is keeping the art of telling stories alive.