

Revise This - July 2016

Revise This! | July 2016

First Mesa Cohort Don Their Caps

By Danie
Watson

Three members of the first weekender cohort of the Wilkes Graduate Creative Writing Program received their degrees following a ceremony held June 4 at the Mesa



The first Mesa cohort graduates from the Wilkes University Graduate Creative Writing Program on June 4. Left to Right: Anna Arnett, Michael Mortimer, Spencer Aubrey.

Center for Higher Education. These students enrolled in 2014, when the Weekender Program debuted at the Wilkes satellite campus in Mesa, Arizona.

Among the M.A. recipients was 91-year-old Anna Arnett, who became the oldest Colonel to join the Wilkes Alumni Association with an M.A. in creative nonfiction. Arnett earned a B.A. in English education with a

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minor in history in 1970, and an M.A. in English education in 1973, both from Arizona State University.

Two members of her cohort also completed their M.A. requirements: Spencer Aubrey in poetry and Michael Mortimer in screenwriting.

Arnett worked with Dr. J. Michael Lennon to complete her creative nonfiction manuscript *Forever Endeavor*, which depicts the life and travels of her Mormon family, beginning with her grandparents, who moved out west 150 years ago. "She is a superb writer with an eye like a pair of tweezers for the telling detail," Lennon said. "She takes us through bad weather, swollen streams, Indian visitors, runaway horses, and lots of warm family stories of struggle and perseverance. She has polished and edited the story beautifully, and it will be of interest to all readers interested in the amazing pioneers of the westward movement in the mid-nineteenth century."

Spencer Aubrey was mentored by Dr. Philip Brady to create his chapbook *apokalupsis*, which addresses the themes of walking through the stages of Christian life and homelessness through the eyes of someone who experiences both. Brady had nothing but praise for Aubrey's poetry. "Spencer is the real thing," he says. "He brings passion and urgency to his work, and he is in possession of an original voice that comes across on the page and through the air. His project has spirit and depth, and he brings an original perspective to age-old questions about love, God, and the power of the soul."

Aubrey says that the relationships he made at Wilkes are paramount to his development as a poet and as a person. His advice to other students: "Build relationships beyond your cohort. I love my cohort, though building community with others beyond it has given me the opportunity to gain perspective on my writing and life in general from multiple angles."

Michael Mortimer worked with Ross Klavan to create his screenplay *An Idiot's Tale*, which is a murder-mystery plot involving neo-Nazis, drug cartels, B-movie makers, illegal immigrants, and a possible war with Mexico. According to Klavan, "Mike writes like a pro and he works like one, too. He didn't hold back and he wasn't afraid of making mistakes so he trusted his own process. ... He worked draft after draft, understood the notes I gave him and made good use of that critique, and I got to watch him sculpt his story from an initial idea to a fully working narrative." Of the mentor/mentee relationship, Mortimer says, "As you work one-on-one with a mentor, the crucial thing becomes being open to constructive criticism and being willing to explore facets of your ideas that you never even thought of, as painful as that process can sometimes be."

Arnett, who received a shout-out from Wilkes Provost Anne Skleder

during the May 21 commencement in Pennsylvania, said that Wilkes has kept her on target. The most important advice for anyone considering Wilkes, she said: "Know yourself. Figure out what you want to learn, find out if Wilkes offers it, and whether you can and will follow their lead, then have at it."

Mortimer agrees. "This program reinvigorated me and, with the help of the awesome faculty, upped my creative abilities, while at the same time giving me a lot more confidence and opening my range of professional possibilities. On top of all that, it has introduced me to a whole community of like-minded individuals. As Wilkes Creative Writing Faculty member Sara Pritchard told me, 'You're now officially one of the creative freaks! Welcome to the tribe.'"

Danie Watson is pursuing her M.A. degree in creative writing from Wilkes University. She has no idea what she wants to do when she grows up, and currently resides in Nanticoke, Pa., with her similarly named boyfriend Daniel and her two nerdy cats, Optimus Prime and Albus Dumbledore.

Summer Creative Writing Workshops

The Wilkes University Graduate Creative Writing program continues to offer its writing workshop series, with three workshops this summer. Two workshops will take place on the Wilkes University campus, while one will be conducted online. Take a look at what we're offering this summer



Wilkes Creative Writing faculty member Kaylie Jones and her master class work on their memoirs in Spring 2016.

and hear from the instructors themselves, all Wilkes Creative Writing alums. Adults of any age 18 or older, regardless of their education level are welcome. Registration is \$60 for each series. Follow your passion, write your story, and learn to get published.

Register for these summer workshops [here](#).

The Craft of Comedy

6-8 p.m. on Mondays – conducted online July 11 to Aug. 15

Instructor: Nichole Kanney M.F.A.'15

As a master's student, Nichole Kanney helped create a cooperative weekly online writing group, in which cohort members from all over the country still participate every Thursday. That activity spawned the idea of running an online workshop. "Since we're a low-res program, it makes sense to incorporate the online component students will experience, should they enroll in the program," Kanney says.

To facilitate the class, Kanney says, "Every writer who signs up for the class will need a valid email, internet connection, and access to Google Hangouts. Hangouts allow us to see each other face to face, provided the users have a webcam, and has proven effective for three years with my weekly workshop. It's simple to use, and rarely has technical difficulties." Material to be workshopped will be emailed to class participants.

Because her workshop will focus on comedy, Kanney will "examine the different craft elements that make comedy effective in writing: character, setting, and dialogue. Since comedy is not limited to one genre, I will pull examples from popular film/television (screenwriting), fiction, and creative nonfiction. The point is to go beyond the 'situation' and make the funny happen naturally, instead of feeling forced."

Kanney disputes the notion that comedy isn't teachable. "I think that once you understand what comedy is and go below the surface jokes, it becomes easier to recognize what will make others laugh. This class is also great for the writer who may not necessarily be writing a straight comedy work, but wants to find a way to reduce tension in their story."

Kanney recalls pitching a comedy script to Stephen La Rue, former creative director at 20th Century Fox TV. "I was laughing during the pitch. I apologized for laughing at myself, and he said, 'If you can't laugh at your own work, no one else will.'"

Nonfiction Places and Spaces

Wednesdays, 6–8 p.m. July 13 to Aug. 17

Instructor: Vicki Mayk M.F.A.'13

Vicki Mayk, Director of Public Relations for Wilkes University and editor of *Wilkes* magazine, says she "wanted to teach a workshop that would allow writers—and me—to focus on one aspect of creative nonfiction. I actually saw a similar workshop offered online and thought a workshop that explores setting would be fun."

She's excited to work on the various writing exercises with students. "Exercises involving setting, really any location, make for something that allows a writer to do something that is more physically experiential. It's a nice change of pace to do exercises that aren't just 'in our heads' or growing out of research." She's planning a field trip for one of the exercises as well.

One of her goals for the class is "to see fellow writers have insights about how setting can better inform their creative nonfiction, whether they are working on memoir, a research work, or essays, and that they will think about setting in different ways."

Essential Elements of Creative Nonfiction

Thursdays, 6–8 p.m. July 14 to Aug. 18

Instructor: Sam Chiarelli M.F.A.'16

Workshop veteran Sam Chiarelli will be teaching his third class at Wilkes. For "Essential Elements of Creative Nonfiction," Chiarelli says, "I've taken both what I've learned, and ideas from my students, to create this new series. I want students to think of this as a six-week CNF boot camp."

In this class, Chiarelli explains, "We are going to cover everything from structure and setting to dialogue and characterization. If that sounds like a lot to cover in six weeks, it is." Chiarelli notes that the class will be both enjoyable and intense because he will be assigning readings between workshops. "The concept behind this workshop is to learn to read like a writer, to take apart published works of creative nonfiction and find out how they work and why they're effective. Finally, we'll apply that knowledge to our own writing and editing," he says.

Fiction and creative nonfiction use the same approaches to get different results, Chiarelli says. "The invented worlds of fiction are assembled to divulge great truths. Creative nonfiction is more about personal experience, connecting with other people through a journey that the

reader is invited to take." Nonfiction is powerful, he says, because the reader knows that the story is true. "The elements of fiction and creative nonfiction are similar, but the ultimate objectives are not the same. Whether students are working on chapters for a book-length memoir or just looking to create some essays, I think this workshop will be very beneficial to them. I'll be using a variety of sources—both essays/memoirs/books and craft materials."

Chiarelli is excited about this workshop series, and looks forward to working with new students. "The students I've had in previous workshops have been so excellent. I know they are going to be up for this challenge. This is also a great workshop to take if you're new to creative nonfiction. Whether this is your first workshop or your tenth, you'll take away plenty to help with your own work," he says.

Register for these summer workshops [here](#).

PWC: Catching Up with Corrigan and Parini

*By Danie
Watson*

Designed to engage, empower, and educate the literary community, the

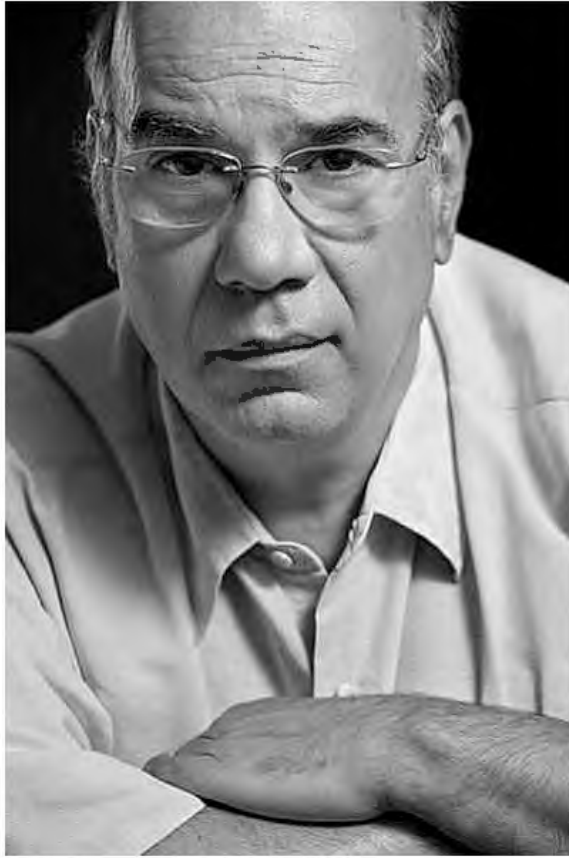


Maureen Corrigan, book critic for NPR's Fresh Air, will host a plenary session entitled "Reviews that Mattered."

Pennsylvania Writer's Conference is a two-day event held on the Wilkes University campus Friday and Saturday, Aug. 5–6. This conference will include a morning plenary session, hosted by Maureen Corrigan, book critic for NPR's *Fresh Air*, and feature a keynote address by Scranton native, biographer, novelist, and poet Jay Parini.

Corrigan
and Parini

are both excited to return to the Wilkes-Barre area. Something about this area keeps him coming back again and again, Parini says. "I always feel drawn to northeast



Jay Parini will deliver the keynote address following dinner on August 6.

Pennsylvania, as I was born in Pittston and raised in Scranton—and I still have relatives in the Wilkes-Barre area." Because some of his work is set in the area, he believes it's important to come back to his roots. "It's important to keep in touch—physically—with this region," he says.

On the other side of the coin, Corrigan is looking forward to her return to Wilkes to "speak to and hear from writers of all ages, at all stages of their careers, and from diverse backgrounds." Corrigan says that her job at Georgetown University surrounds her with students from 18 to 25, so she is enthusiastic about branching out and speaking to writers at all different stages of their lives.

The Pennsylvania Writer's Conference will combine the literary communities of both Wilkes-Barre and the Wilkes University Graduate Creative Writing Program. Corrigan and Parini touched on the importance of community and competition, and how this assists the writing process. Corrigan says, "It is crucial for writers to find a community of other writers and readers that they trust, in order to brainstorm, test out drafts of works in process, and get advice about agents, editors, and fellowships, among other things."

Parini also stresses the importance of finding a literary community, and says that he likes the idea of community-based writing.

Since PWC is open to a wide range of adults, Corrigan says she's excited to meet conference-goers, "get recommendations for the work of writers [she] is not familiar with, and to be exposed to new voices and small press authors."

To get the most out of the Pennsylvania Writer's Conference, Corrigan advises, "Attend as many events as you possibly can, and talk to strangers."

Because the Wilkes University Graduate Creative Writing Program is a community-based experience, the fun doesn't end with PWC. The Wilkes satellite campus in Mesa, Arizona, will host the Arizona Writer's Conference, Nov. 11– 12, at the Mesa Center for Higher Education. Keynote speaker will be Alberto Álvaro Ríos, who holds the Katharine C. Turner Endowed Chair in English and is a Regents' Professor at Arizona State University.

Ríos' most recent book of poems, *A Small Story About the Sky*, was published in 2015 by Copper Canyon Press. Along with nine books of poetry and three short story collections, Ríos's memoir about growing up on the border, *Capirotada*, won the Latino Literary Hall of Fame Award and was the OneBookArizona choice in 2009. His honors include Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, PEN/Beyond Margins and Walt Whitman awards, the first Western States Book Award for fiction, selection as a National Book Award finalist, and six Pushcart Prizes in poetry and fiction.

Danie Watson is pursuing her M.A. degree in Creative Writing from Wilkes University.

Giving Back to the Literary Community

*by Danie
Watson*

It's no
secret that
the Wilkes
community
fosters a
love of
literature

and the act of putting words on a page. What sets our community apart is what we do with that love and passion: share it.



Jason Carney (left) is the director of the Young DFW Writers, which urges students to use their writing to define themselves and their surroundings.

Two Wilkes alumni give back so often, it's become part of their jobs. Jason Carney M.F.A.'13 and John Winston M.F.A.'16 spend their time working with youth, encouraging them to read and use their skills to write about change.

Carney is the founder and director of Young DFW Writers, which runs writing programs in high schools across the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, including the Dallas edition of the national Louder than a Bomb program. Young DFW Writers urges students to use their writing to define themselves and their surroundings.

Winston founded the "Adopt an Author" program to bridge the gap between authors and their young readers, and to create a place where girls and boys learn to love reading and writing. This program was born out of the first outreach



John Winston (center) created the "Adopt an Author" program, to create a place where girls and boys learn to love reading and writing.

program he was ever involved in, which involved motivating middle school-aged boys to read.

"The discovery of your own voice is one of the most powerful tools a person can have," Carney says. "When you define who and what you are, the world is powerless to strip those definitions from you. We live in a society where bias is the norm, the foundation, and we have to break that cycle. Writing is one tool to help break this cycle."

Winston believes writing in underserved communities helps to foster "an essential and vivid imagination, something sorely missing in underserved communities. Seeds are planted in the writing process that germinate and grow through the reading process and have an immeasurable effect on the community as whole."

For Carney, the most meaningful part of his outreach is the creation process. "Seeing a young person catch fire with poetry is so energizing. Watching them find belief in their abilities and who they are as people is a real gift." At the end of the process, not only have the students changed, they have changed him, he says.

Winston was touched by a 15-year-old high school freshman who attended one of his workshops on poetry as lyrics and music in literature. This young man was so inspired that he attended the rest of Winston's workshops, and took his suggestion to put an element of music in his work. "He had even altered a piece of his own work by my last workshop to reflect that sentiment, and presented it to the rest of the attendees."

Carney says that he believed his students had a larger impact on him than he had on them. In South Dakota, Carney worked in a juvenile detention center, where a 14-year-old boy made an impression on him. This boy had ties with the Aryan Nation, and had not been on a good path for quite some time. Carney "planted some seeds," and says that the last he heard, the young boy was improving his attitude, his grades, and his acceptance of other people.

Wilkes has impacted both Winston and Carney's outreach. Carney says that Wilkes has "given him legitimacy," and he has become "an all-around better human being," who uses Wilkes as a standard in his outreach. "They set the bar high," he says. "I have to live up to those examples. Invest in other writers. Cultivate those examples. I need to give freely what was given to me."

Winston agrees that he has to follow the example set by Wilkes. He says, "They lead by example and I will follow suit accordingly when it comes to my own outreach, and the various programs that present themselves."

Their advice for those who want to involve themselves in outreach: Get out there and do it. Carney comments that it is important to give on more than just Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Danie Watson is pursuing her M.A. degree in Creative Writing from Wilkes University.

Faculty News

Faculty member J. Michael Lennon's review of Don DeLillo's new novel, *Zero K*, appeared in the May 6 issue of the (London) *Times Literary Supplement*. His review of Charles Strozier's *Your Friend Forever, A. Lincoln* appeared in the May 5 issue of *Illinois Times*.

Student News

Cheryl Bazzoui M.A.'14 reviewed two novels, *All Waiting is Long* by Barbara J. Taylor, and *Tipping Point*, David Poyer's new naval adventure, on the *BookMark* program of NPR affiliate WPSU. Under her pen name, Ann McCauley, she placed an essay, "Worse than Writer's Block," in the May/June issue of *Working Writer Newsletter*; reviewed *Dimestore* by Lee Smith in the summer issue of *Writer's Advice*; and reviewed *All Waiting is Long* on StoryCircle.org. She will be part of a panel, "Pennsylvania Fiction: What It Is and What It Does," at the Pennsylvania Writers Conference at Wilkes Aug. 5–6.

Wendy Lynn Decker, M.F.A. student and author of YA novel *Sweet Tea*, shared writing tips at the Neptune Library in Neptune, N.J., in May, and discussed her novel with the library's young adult book club in June.

Richard Fellingner, M.F.A.'10, has published a number of opinion columns on the presidential race in the Lancaster, Pa., newspaper LNP/LancasterOnline.com.

Donna Ferrara, M.A.'14, saw her short story "Lucille" published in an anthology, *Crack the Spine: XII*. Her essay, "Snow White and the Art of Toyota Maintenance," was published in *Stirring: A Literary Collection*.

M.F.A. alumna Lori A. May had an essay published in *Off the Shelf*, the book blog of Simon & Shuster. She has joined the masthead as a contributing writer for *Panorama: The Journal of Intelligent Travel*. Lori recently attended the Northwest Travel Writers Conference, and is wrapping up a series of events related to a new project supported by a creation grant from 4Culture, an arts organization in King County, Washington. Finally, Lori is quite pleased to have checked State No. 50 off the to-travel list.

Vicki Mayk, M.F.A.'13, published the personal essay "Shared History" on [Literary Mama](#).

Adrienne Pender, M.F.A.'11, reports that her play *N* is a finalist and will be performed in a staged reading at the Dayton Playhouse's FutureFest New Works Festival July 21-24. *N* is also scheduled for a staged reading at the Eugene O'Neill Festival in September in Danville, Calif., and will receive its fully staged world premiere at Theatre in the Park in Raleigh, N.C., in February 2017.

Caleb Sizemore, M.F.A. student, had his dark comedy *Stripped* workshopped in July at Wolfbane Theatre Co.'s New Works Festival in Appomattox, Va.

Donna Talarico M.F.A.'10 was published in *mental_floss*, *The Guardian*, *Higher Education Network*, *Currents* (trade journal in higher ed communications), and the *Los Angeles Times*, with forthcoming work in *Games World of Puzzles*, *The Writer*, and *Currents*. Donna appeared on ABC 27 in January and February for a social media segment, gave a writing presentation to NYU's social media group, spoke about communication planning at Leadership Lancaster's 2016 Leadership Advantage Summit, and presented at Wilkes' Tom Bigler High School Journalism Conference. She's scheduled to present twice at the Elements Web Conference at Penn State, and she had a storytelling workshop accepted for the HigherEdWeb Conference in Memphis in October.

M.A. student Alan Yount created and published an adult coloring book, *A Walk Around Nantucket*, with his husband Scott Widmeyer. It is the first resort-centric coloring book in the United States. You can learn more about it [here](#).

Dawn D'Aries Zera, M.F.A. '13, was one of 10 finalists for the prestigious 2016 PEN/Bellwether Prize for socially engaged fiction. The award, founded by novelist Barbara Kingsolver, is presented biennially to the author of a previously unpublished novel of high literary caliber that promotes fiction that addresses issues of social justice and the impact of culture and politics on human relationships. Zera's manuscript, titled *Earth Teach Me*, focuses on issues concerning the environment.

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