

Revise This - May 2016

Revise This! | May 2016

Adding Years: An Interview with Mrs. Anna Arnett

By Dale Louise Mervine

"Finding Wilkes has added years to my life," said Mrs. Anna Arnett, who, at age 91, will be the oldest student to graduate from Wilkes this June. While she did mention that she wishes she had heard of Wilkes University in Mesa sooner, she asserts, "I was really ready for Wilkes and have not regretted a moment of my enrollment. It came fairly late in my life, but definitely has enriched it."

Mrs. Arnett first heard of Wilkes at a church Christmas breakfast. It was the same morning her daughter told her to "quit fiddling around with fiction and poetry until you have written every story you know about the family." It just so happened that Wilkes had an open house that day. So she went directly from the breakfast to the campus to get more information. As Mrs. Arnett recalls, "I talked with Bonnie [Culver], and left with a student ID!"

"Wilkes
offered me
exactly
what I was
looking for,
and in a
format to fit
my

Archives

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capabilities.
How could I
not be a fan
of the
university
that has
given me a
new lease
on life? I
am thrilled



*Anna Arnett at Tortilla Flat, Ariz. during March 2016 Wilkes Graduate Creative Writing Program Mesa Weekender ethnography site inspection.
Photo credit: Michael Mortimer*

with the way I've been treated, or should I say babied, all the way through. I have never had more delightful people to work with. Dr. [J. Michael] Lennon has been absolutely fantastic. I doubt I've ever had more fun than I have had since I enrolled in Wilkes."

When speaking of Dr. Lennon, Mrs. Arnett exuded excitement, saying that he, "epitomizes what Ella Wheeler Wilcox said: 'A pat on the back is only a few vertebrae removed from a kick in the pants, but is miles ahead in results.' Dr. Lennon is profuse with his praise. He truly inspires me to keep improving." While Mrs. Arnett knew she would focus on her family history and try to make it readable to teens, she mused, "I don't think I needed to be told what to write, but Dr. Lennon continually points ways to write it better."

"Miss Anna" as her fellow classmates call her, was born in Rexburg, Idaho. In the middle of her senior year of high school, December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, changing her world. "I was taking shorthand and typing to earn a civil service stenographer rating. I worked for a couple of years and happened to meet my future husband, Air Cadet Charles Arnett, at Sunday School in Indianapolis. I saw him a second time the next weekend then not again until I went to Seymour to see him get his wings on my 19th birthday. I didn't lay eyes on him again for 22 months. On his third bombing mission out of England, over Germany, fighter planes hit three of his engines. Charles made it back to the coast but crash-landed in occupied Holland, and became a prisoner of war for eleven months and eleven days, but who's counting? Almost as soon as Charles got back to his home in Arizona, on Wednesday, June 5, 1945, while I was attending Utah State, he proposed, by mail and phone, that we get married in the Arizona Temple on June 15th. I agreed, flunked all my finals, lost ten pounds, made frantic preparations, caught a bus for Arizona and when I stepped out of the bus into his arms, I knew I'd made the right choice. We were married for time and eternity on the fifteenth.

I've detailed my story in *Lolly's Yarns*. Charles died March 8, 2008, but I still feel married. He's only on another overseas assignment. I've always regarded Charles as the most perfect man I could have stood to live with." Growing up on a farm just south of Rexburg, Mrs. Arnett fondly remembered the area, but was more interested in sharing tidbits from her thesis project, which concerns the history of her family. "They were real pioneers," she emphasized. "My mother was born in 1886...on a cattle ranch in a two-room log cabin with a dirt floor and a dirt roof. But a nice fireplace," she laughed again. When I asked her from where her lineage stems, she quipped, "How far back?" and then proceeded to fill in her impressive ancestry. On her father's side, her grandfather was born in Sweden and her grandmother in Denmark. "They joined the Mormon church there," she went on, "[and] came to Utah—before the railroads—so they were real pioneers there." Her mother's immigrant ancestor, she recalled, "was not on the Mayflower, but he built a house in Connecticut in 1650...that was her Wilcox line." This long line of Americans originated in England. "My mother's mother was born after the Mormons were driven out of Nauvoo [Illinois]. She was born in Winter Quarters and arrived in Salt Lake in September 1847, making her one of the earliest Utah pioneers, I knew her; I think I was about in seventh grade when she died. It's been wonderful to learn more about her."

When I asked about her experience at Wilkes and working on her manuscript, she noted that, "It's just been delightful and besides that, having goals I needed to meet helped me make a lot of progress that I have procrastinated for decades in organizing my parents' histories. It has given me a closeness to them that surprises and delights me. I've made field trips into Utah to see where my mother was born and then again where she got her elementary education." When asked to give advice to those considering the program, Mrs. Arnett replied thoughtfully, "I think everyone has a story to tell. It might be a very short story, but every individual is completely unique. Well, maybe not completely unique, because we follow the trends of our society but we each do it in our own unique way. And each person has agency to decide, and is responsible for their own decisions. For instance, nobody can force you to do anything you don't want to do. They might force you physically, but they cannot take away your agency to decide what you will do, or how you will react. Therefore, each one of us is totally responsible for our own decisions." As a woman who has lived "for at least six weeks in sixteen different states and two foreign countries (Australia and Japan)," Mrs. Arnett does not shy away from new experiences. "I love all people, but I think it's a treat when I'm with (or reading about) people who have the same general objectives, namely to express themselves vocally and in print and thus pass on ideas and ideals."

Dale Louise Mervine is completing her M.A. in the Wilkes Graduate Creative Writing Program. She lives in York, Pa.

AWP16 - Los Angeles

The City of Angels welcomed Etruscan authors, Wilkes students and staff alike for the 49th annual AWP Conference and Bookfair.



Wilkes students enjoying dinner break at AWP.

The Association of Writers

and Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair, or AWP16, boasted over 12,000 attendees—in the form of authors, publishers, presses, writing programs, and staff.

AWP16 featured 550 events, with over 2,000 presenters, and Etruscan authors participated in various ways: panels, book signings, and readings...both within the conference and at off-site events in the Los Angeles area. Etruscan, in conjunction with partner Wilkes University, hosted book signings featuring: Bruce Bond, Laurie Jean Cannady, Renée D'Aoust, David Lazar, Diane Raptosh, and Tim Seibles. Cannady and Lazar were also seen signing books at other booths around the Book Fair, while Diane Raptosh and Tim Seibles read and signed books at off-site events. Kazim Ali, Bruce Bond, Renée D'Aoust, David Lazar, Paul Lisicky, and Tim Seibles also served on panels throughout the weekend.

Etruscan also co-sponsored the AWP Old School Slam and Open Mic which was held on both Thursday and Friday nights. Winners of the slam were awarded Etruscan gift bags, complete with their choice of three Etruscan books. Slam attendees flocked to Twitter, using #AWPOldSchoolSlam to enter their name for an Etruscan sponsored contest. One winner was named each night of the Slam, and the prize was a book of the winner's choosing.

Next year will be the 50th anniversary of AWP, and the staff is already looking forward to the event, which will be held in Washington, D.C. from February 8-11, 2017.

Patience and Persistence: Making a Living With Writing

Writing can be a lonely endeavor. When working on an individual piece, writers might easily find themselves cocooned up in their own world.



Lori A. May.

Eventually a writer may work with editors, agents, or others to get their writing into print, but the initial creativity and reshaping and editing the work is done in a somewhat lonely place.

Not that we necessarily mind. We often need that quiet and alone time to get ideas down and to shape our writing. But then there are times we need each other, and we need a community to remind us that we share our lonely pursuit with many others. For those who have jobs outside of "just" writing, we share in those communities and can learn and grow in them, but these places are filled with all kinds of people, not just writers.

When we come together at Wilkes for residencies, we are hyper-focused on our writing, our writing peers, and our writing experiences. We push aside the day-to-day issues of running a household, of working a non-writing job, of caring for aging parents, growing children, and various pets. We take that time for ourselves, to focus on and revel in the one thing we all have in common: our love for writing.

The Wilkes community is strong, and we feel that strength in January and June during our residencies. For the writers with non-writing careers, they need to shift their focus back to their regular lives once they return from residency. For those with writing-careers, perhaps they slide back into their lives a little more slowly, being able to savor the momentum they picked up at residency. In either situation, the time comes to turn back home and get back to work. Instead of waiting for the next six months to pass, however, and the next residency to begin, there are things a writer can do to enhance their creative side. Lori A. May, Wilkes alum and faculty member, has crafted a career out of her writing and has built that career out of patience and persistence. Below is an interview with Lori about her many hats as writer as well as how she balances her

professional work with personal writing, and advice for those just stepping in to freelancing shoes.

What are your "writer" hats?

I'm a big believer in diversifying one's portfolio, so I practice what I preach and wear many different writer hats. My main focus, of course, is on my own work: creative nonfiction, poetry, and fiction, occasionally. My work extends into freelance writing and editing, and I also travel extensively to guest lecture and teach at a variety of conferences and residencies across North America. Those are activities specific to my personal writing life, things that are important to my own development and role as a writer. I also teach and my primary gig is being a mentor in the University of King's College nonfiction MFA program in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I have a wonderful cast of students I adore and it's incredibly fulfilling to work with them as they craft their nonfiction books. Of course, the Wilkes community also knows I teach at the Wilkes residencies and I supervise publishing internships for River & South Review, our student-run literary journal. So, yes, I diversify my workload, and always seem to be shuffling and adding shiny new things to my plate.

What local communities do you involve yourself in as a writer versus "writer" as a job?

It's a challenge being a "local" writer when I travel so much. I'm on the road for about 30,000 miles each year, and then in the air several thousand miles more, attending and speaking at a variety of events, so my "region" is North America. I'm a Canadian writer, transplanted to Seattle now after a near-decade in Detroit, and never seem to be in one place for very long. That being said, I feel it's important to involve myself in my many communities, so I have a sense of place and belonging among my peers.

Wherever I am at the moment, I participate in reading series, both at the mic and attending in support of other writers. I'm also a member of a number of writing groups, both online and in person, that keep each other motivated and informed about writing craft, publication opportunities, and more. This can be incredibly fulfilling, and I value these connections I maintain. That sense of belonging in a community is important to me as we feed off one another's successes and cheer each other on during challenges. I hope I contribute to others' writing lives as much as others contribute to mine. I'm also a fan of book reviewing, and contributing to the conversation about contemporary publishing. Book reviewing keeps me connected to what's current, and is also a way I offer my time to the community. I also have to say how much I have valued the Wilkes community, both the experience of being at residency and keeping relationships with faculty and alums during the terms away. We have a

great source of inspiration among us and I am grateful for the many lasting friendships that have developed over the years.

How do you balance your own writing: do you set aside time every day for journaling, for a specific writing piece you are working on, for this job, for that job--and how do you get yourself to focus on each individually and not get hooked up by one or another?

Maintaining a specific schedule is not my forte, thanks to my travel itinerary. What I am consistent about, though, is making sure the writing always comes first. That may mean focusing on one larger project for the bulk of the day, or dabbling at a few smaller writing tasks, but writing is always number one. Whether I am traveling or at home, I try to start my day with writing new draft material each morning. This is the really rough stuff that wouldn't see the light of day, possibly for a time, or perhaps ever. This is my time to create, to be inventive, and to give myself permission to play. After that, I focus on the projects at hand, and that may mean an entire morning is spent on editing or revising a book project, then the afternoon is spent on promotional work or business matters. When I have student work come in for review, I schedule my time accordingly so they become a priority on my to-do list. When that happens, I'll usually do my morning writing first and then work on student material for the rest of the day. I also carve out a great deal of time for play and napping. Finding balance is always a challenge, but if I feel good and treat myself well, I work so much better.

For those just getting into freelancing, or attempting to make writing their job, what advice do you have? What have you found works when it comes to balancing the work side of writing with the job side of writing?

My biggest advice is to take it one thing at a time. A writer can't do everything all at once. Even though I am an advocate for diversification, I am not a big fan of multi-tasking. Writing, and its related activities, takes focus and time. Beyond running the laundry while I edit, I am not a very good multi-tasker. It makes me feel too disoriented. Instead, I tackle one to-do list item at a time, pay it the attention it deserves, and then move on to the next. For new writers, it can seem especially overwhelming to consider the writing, editing, pitching, social media and more that comes with the job, but everything is manageable in steps. Set goals for what you want to accomplish, then create a plan to make it happen. Strategic planning and realistic goal-setting are critical to keeping my writing life in order. That to-do list should also include friend and family time, quiet thinking time, and time for anything else that's important for self-care. That will help create a sense of balance.

Any other anecdotal insights into making writing a full time job, or

how you weave your various hats together?

I often have emerging writers come to me for advice on how to make a living and how to make writing their full-time profession. I'm always happy to hear about their goals and share some of my experiences, while perhaps offering insight into how to get things off the ground. What is most frustrating to me, though, is the impatience factor. So many times, a new writer wants everything to happen all at once, without paying mind to how long it can take to make a living out of this craft. Sure, for some people, it can seem to happen overnight. That was not my experience. My first paying publications were more than twenty years ago, but it has taken me years—decades—to get to where I am today. A livable wage didn't come to me overnight and even after my first and second novel, I was still maintaining non-writing jobs to pay the bills. I definitely want to encourage emerging writers on their paths, but I also hope to offer some reality checks that patience is necessary, and so is persistence. Writing can be a long-term profession if you go that route, but like anything else it takes perseverance to build a career. It's incredibly rewarding, but it takes time to make writing a full-time career.

*Lori A. May writes across the genres in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. She edits, teaches, and travels as a frequent guest speaker--all the while drinking copious amounts of coffee. Her latest book, *The Write Crowd: Literary Citizenship & The Writing Life*, is now available from Bloomsbury. Also new from 2014 is *Square Feet*, a full-length poetry book, available from Accents Publishing. Lori is also the author of *The Low-Residency MFA Handbook: A Guide for Prospective Creative Writing Students* (Continuum/Bloomsbury), *stains: early poems*, and two crime novels. She's polishing up a travel/immigration memoir and, under the influence of caffeine, is at work on another manuscript.*

From 2004 to 2016: PWC Then and Now

by Danie
Watson

The



Pennsylvania Writers Conference will be returning to the Wilkes University campus from August 5 to August 6, 2016. The conference is a two-day event designed to engage, educate, and empower the literary community. However, PWC 16 is not the first of its kind. In 2004, Wilkes first hosted PWC, which featured Norman Mailer as the keynote speaker.

Dawn Leas, Assistant to the President and M.F.A '09, attended the conference, which was held from June 25-26, 2004. She said that her most memorable moment was hearing Mailer speak, which was one of the last times he was on the Wilkes campus. "Norman Mailer is one of those literary icons you grow up hearing about. He is always larger than life, whether it be in interviews, or in real life, or in the stories Bonnie [Culver] and Mike [Lennon] tell."

Mailer's speech, which concerned point of view, plot, realistic characters, and the unconscious mind as part of the writing process, was so dynamic, Leas can remember where she was sitting in the Dorothy Dickson Darte Center.

This year, PWC's keynote speaker will be Scranton native and poet, novelist, and biographer, Jay Parini. His works include *Robert Frost: A Life*, which won the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for best nonfiction in 2000, *New York Times* bestseller *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner*, and *Empire of Self: A Life of Gore Vidal*. Parini's keynote address will take place at 7 PM on Saturday August 6, 2016, in the Henry Student Center Ballroom.

Behind the scenes of both PWC 2004 and 2016 is Margaret Petty, Director of Continued Learning. Petty is in charge of registration for 2016, and played a key role in 2004. She reminisces about 2004, noting that once Mailer was announced as the keynote, the registrations came tumbling in.

However, the registration and submission process in 2004 was a little different. It was all done manually through snail mail. "People were mailing in manuscripts in boxes and envelopes, and we sent out invoices and welcome letters. All I remember is that submissions were stressful. They were in limbo in the mail—sometimes they were not received, or we would get them late."

Petty says PWC 16 is a streamlined registration process since it's all done online—even submissions for the writing competition. Although registration is just like online shopping—cart and all—the Center for Continued Learning will be accepting calls to register those who are not comfortable with the online system.

Like PWC 2004, this year's conference will include workshops, panels,

and craft classes in the genres of creative nonfiction, fiction, playwriting, poetry, and screenwriting. PWC 16 will also contain two plenary sessions: "Reviews that Mattered" by NPR's *Fresh Air* Book Critic, Maureen Corrigan, and another by the Wilkes faculty.

When Leas attended the conference in 2004, she took a poetry workshop with Rashidah Ismaili, who urged Leas to apply to the program. Because of her obligations, Leas wasn't able to attend the program until January 2006, but her time at PWC 2004 sealed the deal with Wilkes.

PWC 16 will include an element of competition. Like 2004, there will be a writing competition, in the genres of creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry. Submissions may not exceed five pages, and are due by July 22, 2016 with a \$5 entry fee. Attendees may submit in all genres, \$5 per entry. Winners will be awarded following the keynote address on August 6, and the awards are: \$150 for first place, \$100 for second place, and \$50 for third place.

Not only will there be a writing competition, PWC 16 will also include an open mic and poetry slam on Friday, August 5, from 7 PM to 9 PM. The events are open to the public for a \$5 admission fee, and attendees may present for \$5 per event.

The influence of the Pennsylvania Writers Conference can be as large or as small as you make it. For Leas, PWC 2004 is still impacting her life today. Her latest poetry collection, *Take Something When You Go*, concludes with that very poem she wrote in Ismaili's poetry workshop at PWC 2004.

Leas is excited that the conference is returning to Wilkes. "Bringing the conference back is a great idea; not just to recruit more students, but to provide more literary events in the area, and to offer an outlet to be part of a writing community."

For more information about the Pennsylvania Writers Conference, and the schedule of events, please visit the Wilkes website.

Danie Watson is currently working towards her M.A. at Wilkes University. She currently lives in Nanticoke, PA.

Faculty News

Faculty member Robert P. Arthur, with former Wilkes student, Francis Williams, won Chanticleer Book Award for *PASSOVER* in category of ghost novel. Arthur was also nominated for Library of Virginia Book Award (poetry) and Mary Lynn Kotz Book Award (poetry).

Faculty member Gregory Fletcher had an essay, *Thanks, Dad, I Think* published in *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, Volume 8, Issue 28. His short play *Hangman* is having its second production of the year in the festival Take Ten at the 13th Street Repertory at the end of April.

Faculty member Rashidah Ismaili was part of a panel Saturday, April 2, held at City College, CUNY and Columbia University. She was also part of the PEN Voices International Festival April 25 – May 1 in New York City at various locations.

Faculty member and M.F.A. alum Lori A. May taught a Master Class at The Banff Centre this spring, as part of the Creative Nonfiction Collective Conference. Other recent events include a reading at Seattle's At The Inkwell reading series, launched by Wilkes alum Monique Antoinette Lewis, and a workshop at Book Publishers Northwest. Lori is also attending the Canadian Book Summit in Toronto, Ontario, and presenting at the Pacific Northwest Writers Association conference this summer.

Student News

Molly Barari, M.A. alum '15 has been selected as a 2016 South Dakota Humanities Scholar. She has also been accepted to The Writer's Hotel Conference in NYC in June, under the mentorship of Scott Woven and *The New Guard Literary Review*. Over the winter, Molly created and taught a class for Community Education of the Black Hills called *Heirlooms: Creative Life Writing for Seniors*.

Kimberly Behre Kenna, M.A. alum '15 had her poem, "First Day at St. Margaret's Shelter," published in *East Meets West American Writers Review 2015* Winter Edition. Her poem, "Neap Tide," was selected for publication in the upcoming issue of *Rubbertop Review*.

Craig Czury, M.F.A. alum '08 had *Thumb Notes Almanac* translated into Italian by Aldo Villagrossi and published as *Non Pensare Ai Camion* (Milano). Craig has poetry performances with actors & musicians in Soncino, Romanengo, Goito, Salsomaggiore, and Crema, with interviews on LOMBARDIA TV and Radio Alta in May-June.

Brian Fanelli, M.F.A. alum '10 will have his new book of poems, *Waiting for the Dead to Speak*, published in September by NYQ Books. His poem, "What Our Cat Teaches Me in Dreams," was published in the spring issue of *Stone Canoe* out of Syracuse, and another poem, "Trying to Call Forth a Ghost," was recently published in the print anthology of the *Kentucky Review*. The anthology is a "best of 2015." The poems in it originally appeared on the journal's website.

Tyler Grimm, M.F.A. alum '13 will have his short story "Broken Smile" published by VOX, Elizabethtown College's literary magazine, in April. He has also been nominated for the 2016 Elizabethtown College Student Senate Engaging Educator Award.

Nichole Kanney, M.F.A. alum '15 had her short screenplay, *Fridge Mates*, selected as one of two finalists for the 2016 Nashville Film Festival Family/Animated Screenplay Competition. At press time, we learned Nichole won this award. Congratulations!

Dawn Leas, M.F.A. alum '09 released her poetry collection, *Take Something When You Go*, in mid-April by Winter Goose Publishing. She also recently had three poems, "Day Job," "Last Sunday in August," and "Sinew," published in *Clear Poetry*, an online journal based in the UK.

Mark Levy, M.A. alum '08 has a book of essays, *Trophy Envy*, now at the printer.

Monique Antonette Lewis, M.F.A. alum '12 At The Inkwell reading series launched in Denver, in February, and in Seattle, in March. She also welcomed Wilkes alumnae **Kait Burrier** and **Andi Talarico**, in March, as the new co-hosts for At The Inkwell New York. This July, Monique will launch the reading series in London, which will be At The Inkwell's first international presence. Learn more at www.attheinkwell.com.

Margaret McCaffrey M.A. alum '15 had her story "Original Sin" - written in Taylor Polites fiction class - commended and accepted for publication in an anthology by Melaleuca Blue.

Josh Penzone, M.A. alum '13 will have his short story "Rose" appear in *The Critical Pass Review's* upcoming winter magazine.

Dania Ramos, M.A. alum '10 had two short plays in the 6th Annual One-Minute Play Festival at Luna Stage. Her play *Hielo* was featured in the New Jersey Women Playwrights Reading Series co-presented by Writers Theatre of New Jersey, Speranza Theatre Company, and Jersey City Theater Center.

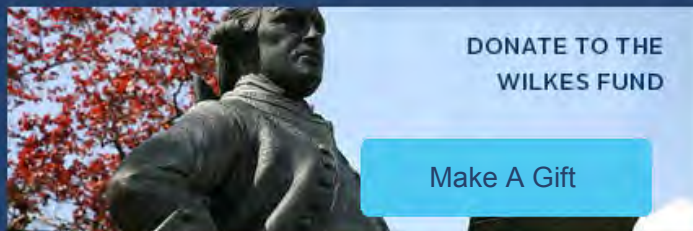
Lynne Reeder, M.A. alum '10 earned first place for her poem "Of Green Stuff Woven" and her poem "Colored" earned her the title of 2016 Perry County Poet Laureate in the 18th annual Perry County Council of the Arts Poetic Excellence Awards.

Julia Steier, M.A. alum '10 had her essay about "Facing my Fear" featured in [The Guardian](#).

Heather A. Taylor, M.F.A. alum '14 has been promoted to Director of the McCann Learning Center at Bethany College. She has also joined the Etruscan Press staff as Production Editor.

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