

Elon Academy brings college aspirations to high school students

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Drew Smith
Summer News Editor

For some Alamance County high school students, it's not just another lazy summer. They've dedicated their time to Elon Academy—living and learning on Elon University's campus during the summer, hoping for a chance to go to college.

At the closing dinner and showcase July 9 in McKinnon Hall, the program showed off its first graduating class.

Deborah Long is Elon Academy's director. She recruits gifted students from troubled high schools in the area. "The way the Elon Academy started

was with President Lambert," Long said. "Lambert said we need to do something for the community; we're losing too many children."

The drop out rate is up to 6.28 percent in Alamance County, compared to a state-wide average of 4.97 percent.

In 2006, Cummings High School in Burlington almost shut down because of the high amount of drop outs. But at the academy, students are kept busy with classes all day and live in the dorms with student mentors.

"Many of these students, they say that without Elon Academy checking up on them all the time, they don't know what they're future would look like,"

said mentor Patrick Holloway.

Holloway has been a part of the program for three years.

"You find people coming up to you and thanking you for helping them out over the last four weeks and it just makes it completely worth it," Holloway said.

The kids are appreciative of the program and the mentors.

"They were really supportive and helped us with everything we needed," said student Elizabeth Tish.

Most of these students come from poor families and tough backgrounds, but they're smart. Each summer, they work to get themselves out of a cycle of

dropouts.

"What's amazing about these students is how determined they are to go to college and how grateful they are for this program," Long said.

Patrick Reid is one of those students, ready for a future. He said Elon Academy is getting him there.

"It makes everyone here more determined and it makes them want to try harder," Reid said. "I think that's really going to help us all later in life."

The program continues throughout the school year with programs on Saturdays. The students attend the summer session three times before graduating from the program.

The man who rose from the 'Ashes' of an Irish childhood

Frank McCourt dies of cancer at 78

Ashley Barnas
Reporter

Frank McCourt, famed author of the memoir "Angela's Ashes," died July 19 of meningitis and ultimately, melanoma. He was 78 years old and living in New York.

It was in 1996 that McCourt plucked from the gutter his golden ticket to fame: Scribner published "Angela's Ashes," which led to his Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography. He wrenched himself from the poverty stricken slums of Limerick, Ireland, and shared his childhood and tales of adolescence with readers who swiftly fell in love with his Irish charm.

McCourt visited Elon University on February 13, 2007, to deliver the Baird Pulitzer Prize Lecture, titled "Was I Teaching or Was I Learning? I'd Say Both." Earlier that day, he shared memories of his life in Ireland and his three decades as a New York City public schools teacher during a question-and-answer session.

"He was a delightful guest," said George Troxler, former dean of cultural and special programs. "He was very generous with his time."

McCourt was on Elon's campus from the morning until the evening of his lecture in McCrary Theatre.

"My job was to escort him all day from the pick-up at the airport to the book signing after the reading—about 12 hours worth," said Cassie Kircher, associate professor of English. "My memory is that he made my job so much fun. He had a good sense of humor and he talked issues—education, especially. I really liked him a lot."

In preparation for McCourt's visit, Kircher had her intermediate writing students read a chapter from "Angela's Ashes," "and we talked about the difference between memoir and the personal essay. Students liked that chapter, and many of the students were already familiar with his work," Kircher said.

Troxler said the education professors were especially excited for McCourt's visit, and set their students to the task of reading his newest book at the time, "Teacher Man," in preparation. The memoir, published in 2005, reflects on McCourt's time as a teacher in high schools and colleges in New York.

"During lunch, four of us talked about his book 'Teacher Man,' and he spoke pretty passionately about teaching inner-city students," Kircher said.

McCourt also wrote "Tis," a memoir that picks up where "Angela's Ashes" left off, and "Angela and the Baby Jesus," an illustrated children's Christmas story about McCourt's mother, Angela, as a child.

"Mccourt is a realist," Kircher said. "His writing is concrete and direct and unsentimental."



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON UNIVERSITY RELATIONS
Pulitzer Prize winner Frank McCourt visited Elon in 2007 as part of the Baird Pulitzer Prize Lecture series.

The raw truth of his stories remained with readers, delighting and haunting alike. During his visit, McCourt pointed out that if he did not have the challenging childhood he did, then he would not have had something to write about. The words he shared with his Elon audience are echoed in the first words of "Angela's Ashes":

"When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood."

The adversity he faced as a young boy in Limerick and the simplicity with which he grew up, was evident and admired during his short visit to campus.

"The day of his visit was really rainy, but he just went with it and didn't seem worried about getting his shoes wet or not having an umbrella," Kircher said.

McCourt kept his audiences laughing and engaged, signing books and taking photos with anyone who approached him. It was apparent that students, faculty and staff took a keen interest in his courage and admired his development into the white-haired and twinkle-eyed man with a gentle Irish-American soul.

"He gave the impression of a delightful Irishman. That's what he was," Troxler said. "He engaged with people. He talked with people. He was an outgoing person—not all authors are."

McCourt was 66 years old when "Angela's Ashes" was published.

"My feeling was that McCourt might have been sort of amused at how famous he became so late in life," Kircher said. "I think that made him really likable. He wasn't a prima donna in any way."

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PHOTO COURTESY OF ELON UNIVERSITY RELATIONS
When Walter Cronkite visited Elon in 2003, he was joined by David Gergen, advisor to four U.S. presidents and chair of the Elon University School of Law Advisory Board. Cronkite spoke to 2,900 people in Alumni Gym.

Elon remembers Cronkite's influence

covering Vietnam after the Tet Offensive, he had a well-known speech calling for troops to be removed from Vietnam. He said the troops needed to be pulled out and America was not winning the war.

"It was definitely not objective, that last part (of the broadcast). It was definitely an editorial," Makemson said. "It's interesting because as much as he talked about objectivity and in many cases did practice it, that was a pretty good example when he didn't."

Cronkite's influence on public opinion was certainly seen after his commentary on Vietnam.

"It was a key defining moment," Barnett said. "When he came back from Vietnam, the tide turned when the most public-trusted person turned."

President Lyndon B. Johnson understood the influence Cronkite had over the American public.

"If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America," Johnson said after Cronkite returned from Vietnam.

A consistent voice through the good times and the bad

Throughout his career, Cronkite was tasked with giving Americans the news on historic events. Many of these events would go on to shape America for years to come.

One of the most well known moments occurred when he gave the public the news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

As he delivered the news, Cronkite became noticeably choked up, took off his glasses and bowed his head for a moment.

"I think he was just a really, really good journalist. He was a human

being," Barnett said. "When he was choked with Kennedy's death, that was a human being moment."

Cronkite was tasked with not only bringing Americans tragic news like the Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations, but also triumphant moments in our nation's history.

When the first man walked on the moon, Cronkite was there to deliver the good news to the country.

Makemson, who recently published a book titled "Media, NASA, and America's Quest for the Moon," said Cronkite started covering the space program in the late 1950s.

"When America landed on the moon in 1969, he knew the astronauts; he was friends with many of them," Makemson said. "He shared in the excitement of what had happened because he had been in the middle of so much of it."

Place in Journalism History

Cronkite has been called the greatest news anchor of all time. Without missing a beat, he brought the public the news during critical points in America's history.

Makemson recalls when he was old enough to start remembering Cronkite as the primary voice in television.

"I just remember him as an individual who folks would turn to," Makemson said.

With many different news outlets now, a primary voice for news is a false idea in today's cable news world.

But in his time, Cronkite was that voice. He was the voice that brought both good news and bad, happiness and tragedy, to the people of America.

—And that's the way it was.