

Alumna examines comedy in motherhood in new book

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DeeDee Filiatreault '93 spent most of her career writing words for other people as a speech writer, but with the publishing of her first book of essays, "Tales from the Crib," the spotlight is on her.



DeeDee Filiatreault

But before she was a speechwriter, Filiatreault studied to be a journalist — and that's where "Tales from the Crib" was born.

Getting her start

While studying at Elon, Filiatreault was Editor-in-Chief of *The Pendulum*.

"When I became [Editor-in-Chief], everyone took a step back and I was the one standing there," Filiatreault said. "It's not like everyone was clamoring for this job. We were kind of a bad-news-bears operation."

Filiatreault was Editor-in-Chief at the time of the 1992 presidential election between Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Bush, the Clintons and the Gores all visited Burlington within a single week.

That week led to a 24-page issue of *The Pendulum* — the longest issue to date in 1992 — after many sleepless nights.

"I remember falling asleep in the shower," she said. "But I think what you learn from that is not necessarily

technical skill as much as just hard work and what's required of you to get the job done."

A fellow Elon alumna and former president of the alumni board, Shannon Moody '94 has been a close friend of Filiatreault since she was a freshman and Filiatreault was a sophomore.

"Because she was [Editor-in-Chief of *The Pendulum*], we got to read her writing weekly," Moody said. "We knew then that she was such a talented, gifted writer."

Switching gears

The hard work paid off when Filiatreault was hired to work on the gubernatorial campaign of Gov. David Beasley of South Carolina after graduation.

"The person that hired me told me that when he read an editorial that I wrote in that issue, there was a descriptive phrase in it and he said, 'I saw in that phrase that you had what I was looking for, and that's the kind of writing I want,'" she said.

After Gov. Beasley was elected, Filiatreault stayed on staff as a speechwriter, eventually becoming his chief speechwriter.

"At the time I thought it would be a short term gig, and then he got elected and everything changed. My whole life pivoted at the moment," she said. "I've been writing for other people from there on out."

Filiatreault didn't anticipate the trajectory of her career while studying at Elon. She was a journalism and broadcast communications double major, but never thought she would stray from the field of journalism.

After working for Gov. Beasley for many years, she moved onto

public relations and worked as the communications director for a large church in Greenville, South Carolina as well as a public relations firm in Columbia, South Carolina that was politically active.

After years in South Carolina, Filiatreault moved to Connecticut with her husband. The two started a family and now have two children.

Telling her tales

Filiatreault returned to the journalism field from speechwriting a few years ago when she pitched a column to her local newspaper, the *Lyme Times*, in which she would chronicle her daily life as a mom.

"They went for it, and they started publishing it every two weeks," she said. "Every two weeks, I would come up with something about my kids and family life in a sort of funny way and trying to muddle through parenthood and make sense of it and make fun of it."

The column was called, "Tales from the Crib" and turned into a blog. Her new book, of the same title, is a compilation of essays from both her columns and her blog.

"I'd always hoped to compile it in some way for me to have — it's sort of a family record," Filiatreault said.

Moody gave some input into the cover design of "Tales from the Crib" and has been watching Filiatreault's process for the past few years leading up to publication.

"This book is a labor of love and has taken many years to get it to this point," Moody said. "It's exciting to see it and hold it in my hands."

Filiatreault's publication pro-



Alumna DeeDee Filiatreault '93 recently published her latest book, "Tales from the Crib," a collection of her columns and blog posts on the humor of motherhood.

cess wasn't typical as she didn't go knocking on doors and pitching her idea to various publishing houses. She was put in contact with an editor at Skyhorse Publishing in New York who began working with her on the book and piecing it together

in preparation for publication. "It was kind of a backwards way of going about it — not the norm," Filiatreault said. "But that's kind of how my life has been. I've just taken backwards into things and it works out."

Dancing in Denmark

Elon associate professor choreographed 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame'

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Lynne Kurdziel-Formato, associate professor of dance, works professionally alongside her position at Elon University and has for many years. This summer, Kurdziel-Formato raised her skill set and experience to yet another level when she traveled across the Atlantic Ocean to the Fredericia Teater [Theatre] in Denmark.

For the past five years as well as during her recent sabbatical, Kurdziel-Formato worked with the Fredericia Teater on projects such as the European premiere of "Aladdin" and the Scandinavian premiere of "The Little Mermaid." Last month she returned from her most recent production abroad, the Scandinavian premiere of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

The show was directed by Thomas Algerholm with music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, manuscript by Peter Parnell and Soren Moller as executive artistic director. Kurdziel-Formato served as director-choreographer.

"Since the time that I was very, very young, I've always wanted to be in theater," Kurdziel-Formato said. "My younger brother and I used to keep our babysitter captivated while we did our own shows and I always danced to music in my head."

Kurdziel-Formato has come a long way

since living room dances and an audience of one. "Hunchback of Notre Dame" enchanted the Fredericia Teater and often sold out shows.

"The Hunchback of Notre Dame" used dance genres such as folk, ballet, jazz and tap. Her director experience allowed her to run rehearsals when Algerholm was accomplishing other jobs to maintain the production's timeline.

Her experience as a choreographer was also critical.

"As the choreographer, [you] have to create how, why and in what fashion do they dance," Kurdziel-Formato said. "You have to read the script. That's what informs you about many, many things — time period, style. You have to read the script to understand the context."

Kurdziel-Formato arranged several big dance numbers, but also orchestrated the staging of large ensemble and choir movements.

"There's a choir that sings, so I had to find a way to move these people in robes and create beautiful patterns on the stage that called into play Catholicism and Christianity, but also took it to a theatrical place," said Kurdziel-Formato.

In "Hunchback of Notre Dame," the main protagonist, Frollo, is torn between his secular self and the passion that he has for Esmeralda. Frollo, the gypsies and the townspeople each have their own vocabulary that changed the way Kurdziel-Formato was inspired to choreograph and stage the show.

Kurdziel-Formato also gained a new set of skills in the professional "Hunchback of Notre Dame" setting that she can apply to Elon student productions.

"This was an enormous technical production," Kurdziel-Formato said. "Even though I



Lynne Kurdziel-Formato, associate professor of dance, directed and choreographed "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

worked with Fredericia before and we've performed at the opera house in Copenhagen, I learned even more about the integration of LED with physical plant and sound design. I mean, we had everything from hydraulics to flying."

Kurdziel-Formato also had the opportunity to work with a larger timeline and budget. The show prepared to go into rehearsal for almost two years with a tech week of three weeks compared to the three days Elon student productions are typically allotted.

Such technical work is not something that is always possible in educational theater.

"It's a different ballgame," Kurdziel-Formato said.

All differences aside, Kurdziel-Formato had no difficulty bringing her newfound knowledge to the Elon performing arts community and working to strengthen her capabilities as a professor.

"I brought back a refreshed desire to continue my own education," said Kurdziel-Formato. "To find those things where maybe I'm not as strong as somebody else. To find the time to study, and put myself into other positions where I can enhance my own education."

Kurdziel-Formato hasn't so much as paused to take a breath since her return to Elon last month. Next on her agenda will be directing and choreographing Elon's Winter Term dance-heavy musical "Cats!" The show presents itself as a perfect foil to past student productions such as "Parade" and "Little Women" because of its allowance for freedom in creativity in dance, within the natural parameters of its lyrics and score.

Kurdziel-Formato then heads back to Denmark, where "Hunchback of Notre Dame" will be remounted at King's Theatre in Copenhagen for the summer. Opening night is set for June 23, 2017.