

Beard Whitlow on her award, her poetry and her process

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STAFF WRITER

Dana Professor of English Carolyn Beard Whitlow enjoys the reputation of being Guilford College's Spartan taskmaster. However, beyond that reputation, Beard Whitlow is no knuckle-rapper. She is a witty and modest woman with an immense passion for her poetry, her teaching and



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Carolyn Beard Whitlow values education at Guilford, where teaching is paramount.

her students.

Beard Whitlow was recently awarded the Sonia Sanchez/ Amiri Baraka Prize for Poetry by North Carolina A&T University for her poem, "Birthright." This poem will be published on the A&T website.

"It feels wonderful to have this particular poem recognized in a national competition," she said.

"Birthright," as Beard Whitlow explained, is a response to Jean Toomer's vignette, "Becky." It also draws a refrain from the Negro spiritual, "Steal Away to Jesus."

"Having 'Birthright' chosen for this prize means that the literature of the Harlem Renaissance is still producing and inspiring new work, even in the 21st century," said Beard Whitlow. "So I'm especially delighted, because it shows a trajectory between what happened in the past and what I and other poets are currently producing."

Beard Whitlow is definitely producing. Recently, storySouth magazine published another of her poems, "At the Blank Blank Bar."

"At the Blank Blank Bar" describes a moment in the life of a man named Sturgeon. Through descriptions of the music and dialogue surrounding Sturgeon, Beard Whitlow seats the reader directly on the stool of a lonely, smoky blues bar.

Alongside the vivid imagery is a series of puns utilizing the names of fish.

"I'm seen as sort of strict or intimidating, but this poem reveals how I am," said Beard Whitlow. "'At the Blank Blank Bar'

has so much humor in it, and there's that side of me that students don't get to see."

Disregarding her "ruthless" facade, Beard Whitlow is a light-hearted woman. However, when it comes to her writing process, she is all business.

"Writing time is so precious as a faculty member at Guilford," she said. "Most years I get to write only one week to one month all year."

"It's short; it's truncated; it's precious."

She continued, "I begin by reading. If you could imagine taking a shelf of books on the subject matter that I'm working in that really give an interdisciplinary approach ... I surround my chair with these books ... and I just read until something ignites."

"When it ignites, I stick with that piece. It could be 24 hours with very little sleep, or it could rest until that next week in the next year."

Beard Whitlow certainly makes the most of her time. "When the Wind Stills," a poetry chapbook, will be released early next year. She is now working on a verse novel, "Witch Hazel," which contains both "Birthright" and "At the Blank Blank Bar."

"Both of these books were inspired by my Historical Perspectives course, Black Women's History and Literature," said Beard Whitlow. "I'm trying to turn history into poetry, and hopefully delightful poetry."

Beard Whitlow juggles her prolific writing with teaching, but teaching is of utmost importance to her.

She chose to teach at Guilford because,

in her words, "I wanted to teach where teaching is paramount, not research or reputation. I wanted to teach where I could make a difference. I know here, that is somewhat of a constant, where students will appreciate me sooner than later, or later if not sooner."

Senior English major Dahlia Ghadry, once a student in Beard Whitlow's poetry workshop, said of her teaching style, "Carolyn's power as a professor comes from her hands-on poetic passion. She's a patient leader, yet fiercely adherent to the importance of intellectual exploration."

Years ago, a student made a sign for Beard Whitlow which she then posted on her door. It read, in large letters, "A's Ain't Cheap," but in smaller font, near the bottom, it stated, "But they're well worth the effort." Unfortunately, most people saw the scary message without reading the punch line.

This sign, now lost, epitomizes Carolyn Beard Whitlow: bold; intense; even scary, until you read into her further.

Then you find she's delightful.

Check out the full interview with Carolyn Beard Whitlow at

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ACCESSIBILITY

Creative minds accentuate Accessibility Awareness Day

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feeling that he had lost everything. And yet, on Oct. 10, Al Foxx came to Dana Auditorium at Guilford College to speak for Accessibility Awareness Day, and he walked about the stage as he told his story.

With time, Foxx emerged from his depression, hopelessness and despair to become the inspirational speaker he is today.

"Focus on what you have, not what you don't have," said Foxx. "See, all of us have something. Even when I was in my wheelchair, I still had more than what I didn't have. ... (This attitude) made life so much easier and helped me to accept myself as I was when I began to focus on the blessings that I still had, instead of focusing all my energy on what I didn't have and couldn't do."

This event alone has already gotten students thinking.

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Al Foxx, president of the Winner's Don't Quit Association

"He said, 'Don't be worried about offending us, because we're not fragile,' and in general I am a bit worried about offending someone who is disabled," said junior James Brady. "I don't really engage people who are really disabled because I don't want to offend them. I don't want to say the wrong thing, but I really shouldn't even worry about that. It's more rude to just ignore them."

The Accessibility Awareness Day events did not stop there.

Shortly following Foxx's presentation, students, faculty and staff were invited to the West Gallery of Founders Hall to experience accessibility-themed arts. Jim Whalen's acoustic performance of clever disability-themed songs book-ended performances of written art. Foxx read from his book, "No Limits," and CCE SGA President senior Yvette Bailey and senior Michael Delson performed personal original poetry. Afterward, attendees had the opportunity to vote on the most touching of the disability-inspired artwork on display.

These Accessibility Awareness Day events, however, are only the beginning of Guilford's movement toward greater awareness and accessibility for all students, faculty and staff.

"My dream is that we will all get to the place where every time that any of us — students, staff or faculty — are planning an event or creating a new policy ... or whatever it may be, that someone in that room will think, 'Hm, is this accessible?'" said Director of the Learning Commons and Chair of the Accessibility Subcommittee Melissa Daniel Frink.

Over the next few years, Guilford's initial five-year accessibility plan will unfold. The first steps include spreading awareness, changing people's attitudes toward



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The Accessibility Awareness Day Committee poses after a successful day of events. (From top left to bottom right) **Melissa Daniel Frink, Georgie Bogdan, Bonnie Richter-Robinson, Al Foxx, Bryan Dooley, and Kim Burke.**

disability and encouraging students, faculty and staff to consider the figurative motorcycle accidents they've faced. Looking forward, Guilford will be working on making information, the website, policies and procedures more inclusive and accessible.

"Be friends," said Foxx to The Guilfordian. And in the words of Frink, "It's a never-ending venture."