

Feature

Exploring conflicts and characters through creative writing medium

By **KAREN ENTRIKEN**
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PAIN. Ask Marianne Gingher, professional writer and UNC creative writing instructor how she describes her profession, and that is the word she will use to describe it to you.

She compares beginning her most recent novel to a big boulder standing in her way.

"I feel like I am walking around a huge rock holding a crowbar and I'm looking for just the right place to fit it in to get the rock off the ground. Finally, I just stick it underneath the rock and lift."

This process seems to have worked for Gingher. Her novel, "Bobby Rex's Greatest Hit," published in 1986, recently won the annual Sir Walter Raleigh award for North Carolina writers and has been optioned for a film.

The novel deals with a young girl named Pally Thompson in the late 1950s and her unrequited love for a local high school heartthrob, Bobby Rex. Bobby leaves their mythical town of Orfax, N.C., to become a rock star. He writes a scandalous number-one hit song about he and Pally "doing it" down by Sawyer's Creek. Meanwhile, Pally is left to contend with a jealous fiancé.

Gingher began her writing career by dabbling in poetry at Salem College and publishing her first short story in the "Greensboro Review" as a graduate student in 1971 at UNC-Greensboro. From there she wrote more short stories, which have been published in literary magazines like North American Review and Carolina Quarterly and commercial magazines like McCall's and Redbook.

Seventeen Magazine published a story in 1983 called "Hummingbird Kimono," which will be part of her newest publication, a short story collection named "Teen Angel." She has been working on editing the book for two years. It will be published by

Atheneum and is due in bookstores by June.

Gingher draws a hodgepodge of personal experiences together, then applies her belief of the duty of an author by putting them in order.

"I write how I wish something would have turned out or how something should have happened had one thing not occurred. I begin with a conflict I want to explore, then find a character it belongs to as much as it does me. It's sort of a magic trick."

In addition to Gingher's work in the writing field, she also teaches two classes a week: English 23W, Introduction to Fiction, and English 34, the second course in the creative writing sequence in the English department. She uses her experiences with editors and publishers as well as input from students to critique her students' works.

Gingher likes to break out of routine curriculum in class by assigning creative assignments. Her English 23W students were asked to write from a viewpoint different from their own. Each student wrote a letter from a character portrayed in a work of fiction they had read, then brought an artifact from that person's life to class, giving their writing a valid aspect.

Her class of 17 English 34 students were given a task on the first day of class. They had to write a love story without using the word "love."

"I wanted them to eliminate all of the mush in their first story," Gingher said. "We read these stories aloud and tried to be generous critics by telling them their successes and excesses."

Gingher believes that the best way to learn to write is to give up the fear of being edited, have good working habits and realize the importance of deadlines.

As critics, she and her class capitalize on what the student writers have done well by telling them what works, not what would happen if the

story had been their own.

Another way Gingher varies class is to have students read from daily journals they keep. Topics range from daily logs to obsessions to ideas for fiction.

Gingher enjoys working in these classes with talented students who offer promising futures in writing and publishing professions.

"Every year I see at least two or three students who go on to become professional writers or editors," Gingher said.

One of her English 23W students became a writer for Rolling Stone magazine, then left a position there as a full-time writer to write a guide to beaches around the world called "Life's a Beach."

Writing time is precious to Gingher because she must fit it in between her teaching schedule, meetings with her agent and publishers, and spending time with her young family. Her method of writing is not like Ernest Hemingway's walk across the beach to a separate house early every morning.

"My method of writing is to get a babysitter. I have a studio away from my house rented from the Greensboro Arts Council. It's a tiny room with a desk, a chair and a typewriter where I go about three or four times a week," Gingher said.

In that office she has been planning her current novel for two years, and she hopes to have it published in three years. It takes her from three to five years to complete a novel.

"I brooded for a very long time about this novel . . . testing a scene here and there, dabbling with the



DTH/Matt Plyler

UNC creative writing instructor Marianne Gingher

characters. I sat down, wrote 15 pages of chapter one and then figured out that this was not chapter one," Gingher said.


The worst part of writing is over after page 200, she said.

"It's like moving to a new town. At first you don't know what grocery store or dentist is right for you, but after you live there for a while it becomes familiar."

The towns Gingher becomes a part of and writes about are mainly

Southern suburban locations. She has set stories in Winston-Salem, Wilmington, Raleigh and several in Orfax, a fictional town she places somewhere near Kernersville.

This type of local writing has been greatly increasing in popularity. And now, noted North Carolina writers such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Doris Betts, Max Steele and Elizabeth Spencer have another respected writer to add to their ranks — Marianne Gingher.



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