

Volume 42, Issue 2, Fall 2019

GRADUATE HUMANITIES

Students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds collaboratively explore interdisciplinary intersections of the arts, historical, cultural, and literary studies within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.

Everyone has a story

In this issue, we relay stories from four more story tellers, Angie Holley ('18), Doug Van Gundy, Eric Waggoner, and Cat Pleska ('98).

We could add in the 60 stories that Cat Pleska collected for *Fearless: Women's Journey's to Self-Empowerment* to make a rough total of 64 stories you know about through this eight-page newsletter. Now, that's a lotta story!

And, get this, each story is loaded with meaning created by the author and maintained by its telling.

Now if I was an anthropologist, I might say we are talking about culture. Not as something static but as a dynamic process. A "process informed by knowledge; through learning and discovery, through understanding gained by experience, and, finally, grasped in the mind with certainty."

How sweet is that?

-Trish Hatfield ('08), Program Assistant

Recent GRADUATE

Kaitlyn Rhodes '19

Major Emphasis: Literary & Cultural Studies

Project Title: "Using Public Media: Content Creation and Implementation."

Yours AFFECTIONATELY:

The Intimate Letters of Lucy Woodbridge and Lewis Summers



Our lead article is comprised of just a few excerpts from Angela Holley's final project which completed her Masters in Humanities last year. Angie is Director of MU's Heart of Appalachia Talent Search Program. Her transcription project provided more background to the excerpts than we were able to include in our limited space, so we made a few minor edits for readability. We left in the transcription notations and most are self-explanatory, except for the dash at the level of a period. It signifies the end of the sentence when periods were omitted in the original.

(Angie) "While I was transcribing letters between Lewis Summers and his future wife, Lucy Woodbridge, it became evident to me that they are far more than love letters. They are precious antiquities that embody local, state, and national history through the eyes of those who experienced it firsthand. I found myself getting emotionally attached to the Glenwood Estate and its former residents.

"Lew's letters illustrate core principles of the humanities. He addressed the social, economic and emotional impact of the Civil War through his personal experience. While people may read the standard historical context of the Civil War in Charleston, Lew's writings allow the reader to visualize the city as it appeared in 1865."

"You folks up in Marietta don't feel the war any!"

Lewis to Lucy, January 14, 1865

"I wish it were so that you could come and take a peep at your future home, and see what you think of it. But at the same time I want it fixed up before you get to it, you might form a bad opinion of it from first appearances. It is greatly out of repair, from the effects of the war, and the uncertainty how long it would remain if attended to.

"The appearance of things has really changed since I used to go [to church]. Many familiar faces are absent, and their places supplied with new ones. It made me real sad to be there; and whilst the exercises were going on, I employed myself thinking over old times; and the contrast was quite

See Letters page 4

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY
Graduate College South Charleston
Graduate Humanities Program
Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter, *Director*
Trish Hatfield '08, *Program Assistant*
Phone: 304-746-2022
marshall.edu/hum



Building from the Ground Up: WEST VIRGINIA'S CULTURAL & CREATIVE ECONOMY

When Dr. Eric Waggoner, Executive Director, West Virginia Humanities Council, joined me (Trish) at the Coal River Coffee Shop in St. Albans for an interview, the young man behind the counter said to him, "I didn't recognize you. You're new here." Dr. Waggoner laughed, and enjoyed that the busy barista had noticed he was there for the first time.

As we waited for our lunch to be served, Dr. Waggoner explained that the barista's comment is the "real world space. We talk about the global village and how everybody's linked, and it is true in a certain sense. But it is equally true that where we live most of our day, if we at all aware of people, is in physical proximity.

"So, in small spaces like this coffee shop, people are building from the ground up the local cultural economy and the creative economy. It's happening all over the state. It not only makes financial sense for West Virginia, it makes sense for an extended, viable civic and public life. Maybe we've lived so long now in the digital village, that people are now looking back at local spaces."

"Missing them?" I asked.

"I think so. I think so. It's that kind of exchange with the barista that is not only sustaining, but makes you feel like you're a part of something bigger than you are by yourself.

"Let's put this into context. Maybe you're living in a town, and there's not

much there in the way of a ready-made cultural infrastructure. One of the things you might say is that we don't have a space, there's no funding. We don't have a university, we don't have a college, we don't have any kind of local area where we can insert things so how do you do that?

West Virginia's at a very interesting pivot point right now, I think—economically, culturally, artistically.

"Well, you find a space that somebody is willing to give over a little bit of square footage one night a week, and you start a reading series. You invite people in from out of town. You get the word out. There's very little overhead. It doesn't take much but a place to stand and a person who owns that space and is willing to go along with it, and BAM, you've got a literary series right there in your own space."

"Cat Pleska organizes the monthly 'More Than Words' for authors and singer/songwriters."

"Yep. My friend and co-teacher Boyd Creasman and I did that in Buckhannon at the Beer and Bards reading series, which ran for ten-and-a-half years. When I first met my wife Jessica, she was running a reader series in a farmer's market in Philippi in an old converted warehouse. It takes a lot of

hustle, but eventually both projects did get traction.

"It's one thing to look around and say, there's no place to gather. Well, if there's no place that suits you, then carve it out. That's what I really love about what people are doing all around the state, especially young people. I mean, look at the folks who are here [in this coffee shop]."

I nodded. "The owners of this coffee shop, Michael and Rachel Ervin, grew up in St. Albans and then moved away. They came back with their young family and a 'desire not only to roast the best coffee but also to brew community.' I complimented Michael on the success of an event they recently hosted and said to him, 'You're just made for this.' And he said, 'I really am.' It's remarkable how many different ages of people they are attracting with their brew and their used book section, signings, game nights, music nights... They seem to come up with new activities every week."

Dr. Waggoner agrees. "There's a real impulse, and I think there always has been, among people who want to stay here and want to make this place into what it's going to be in the future. Because it's not going to be what it was. West Virginia's at a very interesting pivot point right now, I think—economically, culturally, artistically. ■



**In 2018, the West Virginia Humanities Council served
10s of 1,000s residents in 47 Counties:**

**51 Grants
11 Fellowships
1 WV Book Festival
350 Program & Events
8 Counties - WV Folklife Apprenticeship Pairs
1 World - online documentaries, publications, and e-WV**

*West Virginia
Humanities Council*

The West Virginia Humanities Council is an independent, non-partisan nonprofit organization, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Their goal is to bring the world to West Virginia, and West Virginia to the world, by fostering, promoting, and supporting a vigorous cultural life everywhere in the Mountain State.

Spring 2020 SEMINARS • January 13 – May 1, 2020

See www.marshall.edu/humn for more information, including seminar classroom assignments.

ADVANCED REGISTRATION AVAILABLE

Currently enrolled: November 11 - December 6, 2019 | New Admits and Readmits: November 25, 2019

CULS 600 SelTp: Mapping Human Diversity: Genetic Testing, Folk Ideologies of Heredity, and Race (2020 Major Scholar Seminar with Dr. Jonathan Marks, UNC-Charlotte) Seminar in electronic and live meetings Th, 7:00-9:50 PM

The 2020 Major Scholar Seminar will focus on the writings and perspectives of Jonathan Marks, genetic/biological anthropologist whose work on the relationships between science, history, and culture has significantly impacted both academic and public discussions across the sciences and humanities. He is perhaps most well-known for his critiques on race, the genome project, and of ahistorical science. He has also been a leading critic in public debates about direct-to-consumer genetic testing and its marketed correlation to heredity. Understanding, for instance, how and why “I’m 45% Irish” is an invalid scientific claim not only requires deeper knowledge of science, but of history and culture as well. Marks has argued

persuasively, then, that understanding human problems are best approached through engagement with a liberal arts that combines, rather than silos, the sciences and humanities. To this end, students will engage some of Marks’ key works, including *What it Means to be 98% Chimpanzee*, *Why I am Not a Scientist*, and *Is Science Racist?*

For more information see the GHP website: www.marshall.edu/graduatehumanities

CULS 611 Appalachian Studies: Themes & Voices (Pleska) M, 7:00-9:50 PM

This interdisciplinary course orients students to the significant issues and research in Appalachian studies. Important political, social, and cultural issues will be considered. Research areas are introduced. (This core course in the Graduate Certificate in Appalachian Studies may be taken by degree students in Humanities.) *Cat Pleska, MFA, is a 7th generation West Virginian and her memoir, Riding on Comets, was published in 2015 by WVU Press. She is a*

former book reviewer and radio essayist, and is currently working on a collection of travel/ personal essays, The I's Have It: Travels in Ireland and Iceland.

HUMN 650 Selected Topics – Independent Studies (Lassiter) (Arranged by permission only)

For students who need to conduct independent research and/or reading in a specific topic in the humanities, the Program will offer independent studies in those topics as funds allow. Contact the Director for more information. Examples of Special Topics might include: • Film Criticism • Museum Studies • Studies in Appalachian Music • Studies in Poetry • Language and Communication.

HUMN 680 Independent Research Symposium (Lassiter) (Arranged by permission only)

A pro-seminar required of all humanities degree students who are beginning the thesis or final project. Arranged with the Program Director.

“Sugar Maple”

From “Trees Respond to Winter”
~ *A Life Above Water* ~
Poems by Doug Van Gundy

Sugar Maple is so lively and lovely
that you don’t mind waiting
while she tries on her entire wardrobe.
“This green one is nice,” she says,
“but I’m feeling a little more adventurous.
This is an occasion that calls for
adventure, don’t you agree?
Maybe I’ll wear this gold one . . .
or maybe the rust, it really flatters my figure.”
Soon the floor is strewn with bright colors,
tried on and discarded.
“I know . . . red!” she exclaims,
But you know that she’ll finally settle
on the gray, skin-tight number;
she wears it every year.



(www.lostrivers.ca)

LETTERS from page 1

depressing, a few years ago I was in a large class. Now I am the only one remaining.

Some have died, some killed in battle, and the rest are either South in the rebel army or in the North as prisoners of war.

"My old teacher is the only one left besides myself_ and so it is with all my old school-mates, they are scattered abroad or dead. There are only two besides myself in town. Is it any wonder that I sometimes feel sad? When I go to town the change is so apparent that it disheartens me_ I see none of the old faces, all are new and strange: and I feel as if I were wandering through some strange city, or as Rip Van Winkle did when he visited his native town, after his long sleep_ I think I know more persons in Marietta than here, and I certainly have better friends there. I know not how I will like it, after I have graduated, to live in the new old place_"

Lew to Lucy, January 23, 1865

"You folks up to Marietta dont {sic} feel the war any, would hardly know it was going on but for the papers, and cannot appreciate the blessing of peace as we folks down here who have been right

in the middle of it_ It will make quite a change in our condition_ I hope for the better, it cant {sic} be much worse_ Hope we will get over the demoralizing effects of the war soon, and return to a state of civilization."

(Angie) *"While the letters share meaningful glimpses of history, the core of their existence is based on the love held between Lucy and Lew. After reading the intimate correspondence, one cannot help but admire the tenderness of their love for one another and the innocence of their young flirtations. It is difficult to fully comprehend the true affection shared between Lucy and Lew without reading their letters as a fluid correspondence. [These excerpts] provide an example of how connected passages permit a reader to gain a respect for the closeness shared between the authors."*

"I Know You Miss Me"

Lucy to Lew July 1, 1865

"What a blessed a thing sleep is _ how wisely ordained. without it we would soon expire with the 'blues.' ___ but why should I speak this either with or without

this comfort sleep, for I know there is one who though far away loves and remembers me and will in a few short weeks return to me again."

Lew to Lucy July 8, 1865

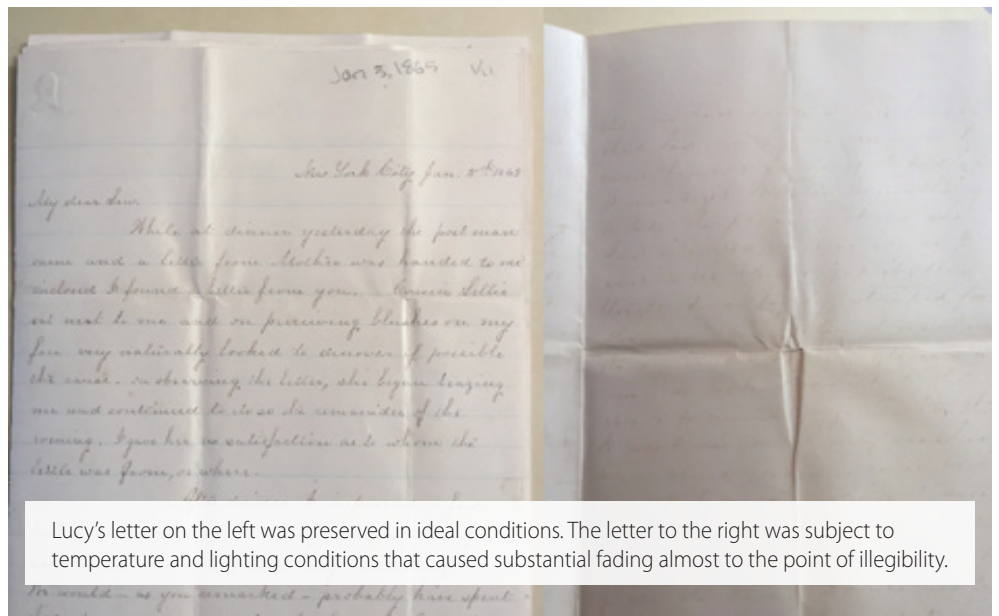
"I am glad to hear that you have had no more attacks of 'the blues', for I know you enjoy yourself much better than if you had them. Perhaps you cry before I warded off any repetition_ Think hereafter it would be best to have them when I am still in Marietta, and then I can come & console with you before I leave. Dont {sic} give up to them, keep a cheerful disposition. I know you miss me & think of me without such evidences. I am constantly finding myself thinking of you_ Everything that happens, everything I am, [illegible] remote from you suggests thoughts of you. Singular too, how the mind works round to one thing from such distant starting points. No matter when I start, nor how long the train of thought is, the result is always the same. You seem a magnetic center around which circulate & towards which point all my ideas. Long may it be so." ■

PROCESSES OF PRESERVING & TRANSCRIBING

"I wore gloves to touch each letter as I carefully photographed them page by page to create an electronic method of preservation. Some of the letters ... were upwards of nineteen pages. The writers used various types of paper when corresponding. The type of paper determined [how the letter was folded] to fit in an envelope. Creasing of pages sometimes made it a challenge in transcribing passages. The pages at times did not follow sequential order and lacked page numbers."

"Lucy's writing was easier to decipher and resulted in few illegible references. Lew's writings were more challenging and as such had multiple and illegible references throughout...."

Next page



"By her own self-report, Lucy often had more time dedicated to writing her letters and therefore, she was able to [write] legibly.

"Lew, however, often referenced that he was writing letters in a hurry or at very late hours. . . . He once indicated that he was still writing at 5 AM. As a result, his handwriting is often less structured and more difficult to read.

"[Letters] written in pencil are often faded. Fountain pen can bleed through the paper resulting in words running together. . . . Yet, the more comfortable I became with the personality of the author, the easier it was to determine what his\her letter contained.

"As I transcribed each letter I utilized footnotes to highlight information that may be unknown to the reader and/or holds historical significance. For example, in a letter written by Lucy to Lew on January 5, 1865, there were 35 footnotes; many of which referenced a trip she took to New York City.

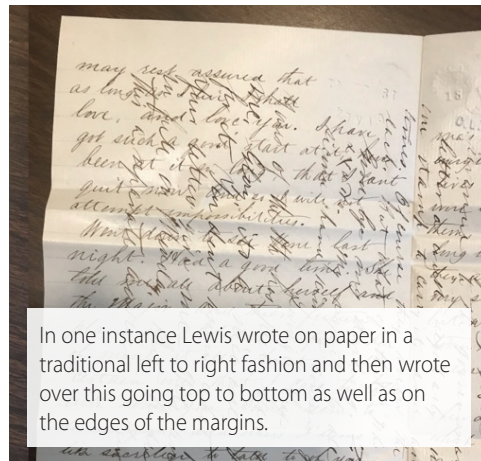
"To help create historical authenticity, I felt it imperative to provide as detailed a description as possible within the footnote descriptions. One such example is when Lucy referred to possibly going to Bradley's studio for a portrait while in New York. When researching the significance of this, I discovered that the studio belonged to Matthew Brady, whose photography

was made famous by his portraits of the aftermath of Antietam and Gettysburg during the Civil War.

"Information such as this proves invaluable in placing the content of the letter into a historical timeframe. It also helps to reveal how Lucy's perspective of the world around her was in stark contrast to Lew's. Lucy often spoke of social encounters and social settings. She only referenced the Civil War when responding to Lew about the topic. Much of Lucy's life had been spent in Marietta, Ohio, as the daughter of a wealthy businessman. Unfortunately, Charleston did not have the opportunity to reap the rewards of industrial development during the war." ■



Lewis & Lucy Summers circa 1920.



In one instance Lewis wrote on paper in a traditional left to right fashion and then wrote over this going top to bottom as well as on the edges of the margins.

"I learned that the study of the Humanities is more than theory and discussion, [it is also] a practice of cultural and historic preservation. While time periods lend to different economic, social and political environments, the relationship development between Lucy and Lew mimic many love stories of today."

– Angie Holley ('18)



People on front lawn at Glenwood Estate circa 1890.

The Glenwood Center for Scholarship in the Humanities

Based at the Glenwood Estate on the west side of Charleston the Center supports humanities-based research, hosts visiting scholars, involves students in archival work and other preservation projects at the Glenwood Estate, and advances collaborative grant and fund development.

Read more at www.marshall.edu/glenwoodcenter

The Humanities ARE “EVERYWHERE-PRESENT”

An Interview with Dr. Eric Waggoner
Executive Director, West Virginia Humanities Council

(Trish) The coffee shop was busy with coffee-making and people talking and a sound system providing a comfortable ambiance with contemporary acoustical music.

Our lunch was served and before long, Dr. Waggoner took on my big question: How has your long interest and experience in the humanities, your writing and teaching, your music, and now, as Executive Director of the WV Humanities Council, led to this moment?

“As a kid, one of the things I really loved doing, and I knew I loved doing early on, was reading and hearing stories. I loved Warner Brothers cartoons, little seven-minute narratives that were cyclical in a way. They were always the same kind of conflicts again and again. Like a lot of kids, I loved to hear stories.

“You know when you're little, that's a lot of fun, Mom and Dad reading you stories. And I was lucky enough to be in a household where both my parents really valued reading. Mom and Dad wanted to know what my sister and I were reading, but they never said, ‘No, don't read that, that's too old for you.’ So early on there was a lot of freedom.

“I'm very big on the idea of trying to figure out what it is that you can contribute that nobody else can. What is it that you really love doing? What are the skill sets that come along with that love, that you can lean into in some kind of creative fashion? Find something that you can contribute to that is larger than what you can accomplish all by yourself.

“I knew I liked to read books, watch movies. I like listening to music and making music. And I like writing. So, I thought, what was the job that society has created that would allow me to do that stuff all day? And it was teaching. I also like being able to talk to other people about these things. Talking about them and helping people grasp how they worked was something really interesting to me.”

Dr. Waggoner didn't feel like moving to the Humanities Council was too big of a leap from his teaching at Wesleyan.

“For this position, I still have to read widely. I have to familiarize myself with what's going on in contemporary film and music and cultural productions, only now I have a particular impetus to familiarize myself with everything that's happening around the state, but also to know what's going on around the country.

“What's really notable in my change of position is that I've continued teaching, just in a different way. It took me awhile to see that, but this is an opportunity to support people who are doing really quality work all around the state.

“Strangely, we always have to make a case for the value of the humanities because paradoxically, the humanities are so everywhere-present in our lives that we don't often think about them. Stories are all around us. Even here, where we are in Appalachia and West Virginia, material skills and ways of communicating information that are not academic, or scholastic in nature are practiced in community centers and churches and families and so forth.

“The older you get, you find out that there's a fundamentally chaotic element to our lives. When you're little you're told that a lot of things make sense, in terms of religious faith, or how your family structure happens to be organized; but it doesn't take long to figure out the world is a lot more complex than any one model can accommodate.

“So, what stories do, in a broad sense, is help give you frameworks to imagine what the world might be like from other perspectives. They also allow you to organize your own experiences so they make sense in terms of your own unique perspective.

“I really do believe stories are away in which we, early on, enter into the world. We get involved with a dynamic that's much larger than ourselves. And we

As Dr. Waggoner travels around the state speaking about what the Humanities Council does, he uses this umbrella definition for the humanities:

“Any pursuit that helps us to articulate what our experience was, what our values were, or what our challenges were.

“The story of us in a particular time and place: that's the humanities, and that's certainly literature and certainly history. But it's also anthropology, it's law and jurisprudence, it's the study of language and linguistics, it's the study of folk practices and traditional skills and pursuits that are passed down from generation to generation.

“It's a big umbrella, but beneath that umbrella are all the pursuits that allow us to express our core experiences and values.”

come to understand the complexity of life in much fuller ways that honor the diversity and experience of life.

“Stories also allow people to connect. The notion of diversity doesn't suggest that we're so isolated in our own experiences and stories that we can't each come to an understanding of another person's experience.

“One of the basic points of telling stories at all is to create an audience. To give yourself an audience that responds and talks back, and to whom you allow access to your story. A real point of entry for me is, what's the contact point for that exchange? And that's where the humanities come in. They create points of contact between and among different communities.”

Next page

“What do you mean, different communities?”

“Well, those communities can be rooted in many contexts. Like time: You can learn about a time period that you weren't alive for. The record that's left, allows readers to access what people were thinking about and arguing about, and what joy they got from what sources. You can take a record of a period and really get a sense of what it was all about.”

“Like our lead story on the letters between Lucy Woodbridge and Lewis Summers in 1865.”

“That exchange of important stories goes on all around us – the record of who we were, and what we experienced, and what life was about for us when we were here. We're generating that all the time. We're generating it in our texts and emails, and also in academic settings and in journals and diaries and letters and documents you'd think would be of interest only to the people exchanging them.

“With a long history and the benefit of time, those exchanges become a record of what it was like to live in a place, and they become historically important. And there will always be people who want to preserve them and are attuned to the importance of those sorts of writings. They're the ones who are going to preserve a part of history all on their own.

“It sounds banal in some ways that the ability to express yourself and be able to compose your story of your experience is fundamental not only to your own understanding of who you are, but to other people in and out of your own time and space understanding what your experience was all about. We are hungry for stories; we seek this stuff out. Even binge-watching on Netflix is just another iteration of this very basic human impulse.

“The impulse, the act of telling and seeking stories, is always there. Always has been, throughout human history. As technology has advanced and we've recognized ourselves as a culture that

values this sort of impulse, we've really been able to preserve and rescue a lot of stories from erasure that otherwise would have been lost.

“That's not a small thing, that's not a luxury. That's a fundamental elemental element of our human experience.

“The supposed narrative of this place has been so rooted in suffering. All the problems that Appalachia faces, we have in them in West Virginia in spades. But there's lots of stuff here that people value and that people want.

“There's so much going on around the state in terms of people who are talking to each other about these matters. Articulating in the broadest sense. It could be through narrative or music or through other kinds of cultural productions. So many people in West Virginia have started talking. They're voices that are really, really worth listening to.” ■



Dr. Eric Waggoner is Executive Director of the West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan

nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The WV Humanities Council is one of our program partners. They have provided grant support for several of our projects and have often collaborated with us informally.

Up until last year, Dr. Waggoner taught English at West Virginia Wesleyan College and was a member of the core teaching staff for Wesleyan's Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing. He's still teaching in the MFA program as Guest Faculty.

His own writings include creative nonfiction and literary criticism, and have appeared in numerous peer-reviewed journals and book collections, most recently, *American Literature in Transition, 1970-1980* (Cambridge UP, 2018).

Over a 19-year music and cultural journalism career, he has written hundreds of profile pieces and book, album, concert, and film reviews. He has published long-form interviews with artists and musicians including Laurie Anderson, Henry Rollins, Jeff Tweedy, Ralph Stanley, Terry Riley, Wanda Jackson, Dean and Gene Ween, and many more. And he's founding editor and publisher of Latham House Press, a micropress dedicated to releasing first “chapbooks” by promising Appalachian writers. ■

To Do List For Saturday

- Do laundry
- Vacuum the house
- Go for a walk
- Find a dragon's tooth
- Use it to write in river sand
- Stay the demon's of dailiness
- Climb a magnolia tree
- Wait for the stars to appear
- Wash in moonlight
- Choose a perfect blossom
- Curl up in it and sleep
- Wake with wings unfolding
- Join a flock of passing birds
- Fly into morning light

- Fonda Bell Miller



Graduate College South Charleston
Graduate Humanities Program
100 Angus E. Peyton Drive
South Charleston WV 25303-1600
marshall.edu/humn

“What’s most striking in the course of reading and hearing stories is when you encounter an idea that’s deeply intimate and familiar to you, but that you’d never heard articulated in that way; or when you encounter something you’ve never once, at all, considered might be true.

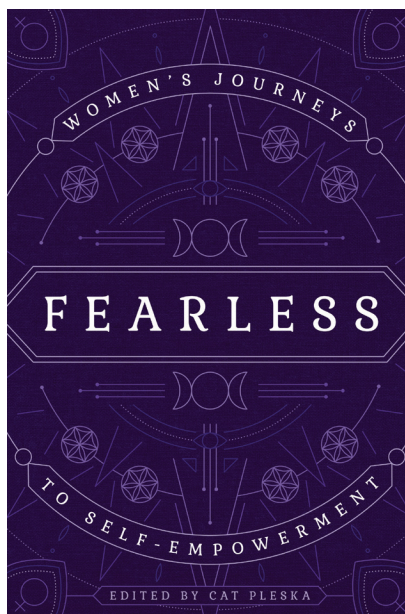
“Those are the two kinds of moments you remember after the story’s done. Those are the two things that have the capacity to really change you.”

– Dr. Eric Waggoner
Executive Director, The West Virginia Humanities Council

Book **CAT PLESKA** **NEW ANTHOLOGY OF 30 WOMEN’S STORIES INSPIRED BY THE #METOO MOVEMENT**

Seeking a way to provide women a platform from which to be heard and inspired by the recent #MeToo movement, editor Cat Pleska ('98), collected essays, stories, and poems from 30 regional women. Each writes about her most challenging moment and how she learned not just to endure, but to win.

“Whenever a movement swirls through our country, people often wish they could be heard in order to share their own journey, to have a voice stand out among the great cacophony that characterizes our society,” explained Pleska, author, and faculty member of the Graduate Humanities Program.



Pleska asked 30 more women to comment each on one piece in the anthology, thereby doubling the female perspective.

“No one will finish *Fearless* without feeling a deep respect for these writers, and encouraged to begin their own journey to self-empowerment,” said author Natalie Sypolt.

Fearless copies can be ordered through many regional bookstores, Amazon, or the press’s website:
www.mountainstatepress.org.

Pleska can be reached at msp1@mountainstatepress.org.