

Heather Hanners

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Long time Poet and SIUE Professor has a Passion for Teaching

Picture yourself on the beach, wind in your hair, and smell of the ocean. For poet Allison Funk those are special memories of where she grew up. Funk is currently a professor at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, teaching her students the art of poetry. Most importantly however, is that she is an established poet herself.

Funk grew up on the east coast near the ocean spending a great deal of her time reading and expressing herself through creative writing. In 1973 she graduated from college and landed many jobs which included working in Public Relations, Ad Agencies, Advertising, and writing for magazines. Taking a strong interest for creative writing she later attended graduate school where she studied poetry. Funk had always had a strong interest for the art, but lacked a female influence. During this time, males mostly dominated the world of poetry. She only remembers being familiarized with two female poets during her school days. However, looking beyond the norm, Funk became an established poet, later publishing two books of her poetry, and also winning the Samuel French Morse Prize, which she says are three of her most memorable and greatest accomplishments thus far. She remembers getting both phone calls when she found out her poetry was being published.

Although swearing that she would never become a teacher, after graduate school she moved to the Midwest and became a professor at SIUE taking her love for poetry and carrying it

into the classroom. When asked which she would rather do more, teach or write poetry, she smiled and said, "Can I say both?" She has an equal love for poetry and teaching her students. Funk says she couldn't imagine not being able to share her passion with her students who also inspire her. "I would feel unsatisfied if I stopped working with students," she says. People may wonder why would anyone want to go to school for creative writing or poetry, what could anyone possibly do with a poetry degree? Funk says that for anyone who loves to write and can write well, will find work in a related field. It's all about passion and loving what you do.

She began teaching at SIUE in 1990 and jokes that she started with a one-page syllabus and now uses a three-page syllabus due to all of the guidelines and demands of students today. Funk uses a free flowing type of atmosphere in her classroom; she likes one on one conversation, and interacting with her students. Funk says, "I often do the assignments with my students, if I haven't done them before." She believes poetry is an ongoing learning opportunity because it is always changing, and that her students are very creative and often times even inspire her to write pieces on her own.

For someone so busy, how does she find any time to write her own poetry outside of teaching, and how does she find time for herself? When Funk has spare time she enjoys yoga, walking, swimming, and movies, and also finds time to spend with her family. For aspiring poets she recommends setting aside time for your writing. You may write for an hour a day, or two hours a day, but set a time and always write at that time. She said to, "Make writing an appointment." If you make it an appointment and see it like any other kind of appointment you will find the time and be there.

After moving to the Mid West, Funk's writing has a lot to do about the land, and particularly writes a lot about the Mississippi River. She also writes about particular moments in time. For aspiring poets today, she says, "There is room for everyone now; poetry in the U.S. is the most diverse and exciting it has ever been." There is a place for everyone to express themselves in poetry.

She continues to write, and says she is still not satisfied and hopes to continue to better herself. When asked, what would you like people to remember about your poetry? She replied, "I hope my poems would maybe still touch people, or oh, her language is really beautiful."