

Friday, Jun 01, 2018

## English professor's memoir wins national writing contest

Oakland University English Professor [Kathleen Pfeiffer](#) has been named a winner of the 2018 [Michigan Writers Cooperative Press](#) (MWCP) Chapbook Competition for her newly published memoir, *Ink*. The annual competition features submissions from writers throughout the U.S., with winners receiving publication and marketing support.

Composed of three essays, *Ink* is an artfully woven tapestry of emotions and events, drawing on personal recollections and historical research. In it, Pfeiffer chronicles memories of her brother Gerry, who died at age 11 after a seven-month battle with brain cancer.

Pfeiffer, who was 13 at the time, looks back at her younger self as she grappled with issues of grief, loss, faith and hope.

"I wrote this as a way to make meaning out of loss, and to take an experience of grief and turn it into an opportunity for growth and empowerment," Pfeiffer said. "It's also a story about particular times and particular places – what it's like growing up in the late '70s and going to college in the mid-'80s, and also what it's like trying to forge a career as a writer and professor during the time I'm in now."

In recent years, Pfeiffer has devoted much of her time to studying memoirs and teaching classes focused on the genre. She used her knowledge and experience to craft *Ink*, which she describes as her first significant work of creative nonfiction.

As part of her research for the book, Pfeiffer revisited pop culture of the time, reviewed yearbooks, cards and notes, and consulted with friends and family. She also searched archives of newspapers from the Connecticut town where she grew up.

"I wanted to check my memories and reconstruct what day-to-day life was like back then," Pfeiffer explained.

Chapbook competition judge Melissa Grunow called *Ink* a "refreshing and hopeful remastering of the grief memoir (that) will resonate with anyone seeking explanations for the unexplainable and closure for the heartache that never stops hurting."

Pfeiffer sees the book as an example of how people can use their past to bring new, more constructive, meaning to their present.

"You don't have to be stuck in a story that no longer suits you," she said. "It's possible to construct a different story about your past as you go through life and to revise the meaning of your personal history in order to move forward."

Pfeiffer will be honored on June 10, at a public reading and reception at [Interlochen Center for the Arts](#). Her book is available at [Amazon.com](#).

### ***Ink* in performance**

Oakland University Dance Professors [Ali Woerner](#) and [Thayer Jonutz](#) created a dance version of *Ink*, with their dance company, Take Root. To view a performance, [click here](#).



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