

Preface

We were pioneers. We were innovators. We were independent learners and thinkers. In the 1960s and 1970s, we were among the first generation of college students to study creative writing, American studies, environmental studies, women's studies, and other disciplines. We were drawn to a young college full of promise and unencumbered by traditional academia. Few of us comprehended how challenging this path would sometimes prove to be. In 1968, Kirkland College opened in Clinton, New York, during a time of social, political, and cultural turmoil. As of 2013, it was the last women's college—and the last coordinate college—established in the United States. Known for innovation, Kirkland offered written evaluations rather than grades; interdisciplinary curricula; self-designed concentrations, independent studies, and senior projects. Students governed themselves, made critical decisions about their own course of study, and had an opportunity to pursue an education that, ultimately, was designed to empower women. Yet, after a tumultuous merger with coordinate partner Hamilton College, Kirkland ceased to exist in May 1978. So, how did a literary anthology from Kirkland's diasporic community come about?

In June 2007, I coordinated Kirkland Voices, the first-ever alumnae reunion reading, with Liz Horwitt. A half-dozen readers traveled from Maine to California back to the Hill to read in the Red Pit during the all-Kirkland reunion at Hamilton College. During the reading, many thoughts and emotions crossed my mind. One was relief that a year of planning had finally come to fruition. Another was how seamlessly the readers presented their work—we had never met one another until a few hours before the reading, yet our voices flowed together harmoniously. As I listened to work I had not previously read or heard, I kept thinking, "This is so good!" I wanted to capture and share this moment. At some point between the standing-room reading itself and the reception with chocolate-dipped strawberries and macaroons, I had a notion: Why not publish an anthology so that alumnae who couldn't attend would be able to read this fine work? *Lost Orchard* was born.

Soliciting work from the contributors to Kirkland Voices was easy. But finding other accomplished Kirkland writers would prove to be more difficult, given that for thirty years Kirkland's alumnae have not had a continuously functioning alumnae association, an up-to-date alumnae directory, or a brick-and-mortar (in our case, concrete block) institution of our own to nurture or support us—or, indeed, to connect us. Primarily through the use of social media, the Internet, and word of mouth, I was able to locate many potential contributors and reach out personally.

Facilitating this literary union has been immensely satisfying and profoundly poignant: the project of a lifetime. Selfishly, I wanted to gather the Kirkland community together once again—even if only in the pages of a book—to preserve our legacy. Kirkland's alumnae are finite. We are acutely aware that our history may vanish once the last Kirkland professor and last Kirkland alumna are gone.

Lost Orchard, created to commemorate the occasion of the Charter Class's fortieth anniversary, includes poetry, drama, stories, and creative nonfiction by Kirkland's faculty, administration, and alumnae. It also features work that was read during Kirkland Voices as well as one-act plays written, directed, and performed by alumnae for the 2007 reunion. These contributions encompass a multiplicity of themes and genres yet reflect a commonality of gender, experience, attitude, and age.

Although *Lost Orchard's* contributors did not all study creative writing, this anthology also provides a glimpse at the vibrant, supportive writing community that Kirkland fostered. Kirkland students had the opportunity to pursue a major in creative writing—one of a handful of colleges to do so. According to the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), only three colleges—including Kirkland—conferred a bachelor of arts in creative writing in 1975.

Under Bill Rosenfeld's steady direction, Kirkland's nascent Creative Writing Program attracted such talented teachers as Kathy Dewart, Naomi Lazard, Denise Levertov, Tess Gallagher, and Michael Burkard. Many Kirkland students also took workshops at Hamilton with two young poets: David Rigsbee and David Lehman.

Kirkland was a bold experiment in women's education. Although the college only lasted a decade, what a brilliant decade it was! May *Lost Orchard*, in some way, keep Kirkland's light burning brightly.

Foreword

It all comes back to life. The Creative Writing Program with its place in the Kirkland College setting. The workshops at home in the carpeted levels of the Red Pit, the exhibition areas in the List Building, the dormitory lounges, all the learning and living spaces united in purpose.

Above all were the intentions and skills of those purposeful Kirkland students—the people who made the program work, insisted that it function to their satisfaction and advantage. And how hard they worked! Certainly some enrolled to find out what it was all about, several of those from across College Hill Road. (During my first year, a Hamilton enrollee approached me after class and asked, “Are all Kirkland courses this lively?” Such refreshing questions as that give you pause. I couldn’t satisfy him with an answer. I just smiled in appreciation, but certainly our workshops were as demanding as they were lively.)

Here’s another angle on the same issue: A different student—a genuine Kirkland College citizen—observed in her course evaluation, “In the workshops, there’s no place to hide! You’re expected to speak up about other people’s work, and you have to sit there and listen to your classmates criticize your work—constructive criticism, certainly, as demanded by the faculty, but criticism nonetheless, until you yourself are capable of applying serious standards to your own work.” She had specified one of our most important goals: the artistic toil of writing fused to the writer’s own honest self-evaluation.

From among all those who joined the writing workshops a surprising number continued to write poetry and fiction. But that aside, all members came away with sharpened skills as readers and critics. By the way, those Kirkland people who went on to graduate programs were invariably noteworthy for their skill at conducting critical sessions. That’s the feedback we faculty got, and very gratifying it was.

Also gratifying were the students, some of whom are included in this anthology, who continued their writing in genres other than fiction or poetry but who credited their success in large part to creative writing.

Several of those fashioned double majors and went on to success as editors of law reviews. One who doubled in creative writing and biology became editor of the creative writing magazine attached to her pre-med school. Then there were several who never took a workshop but, influenced by the emphasis on writing in general at Kirkland, pursued writing careers of one type or another, such as creative nonfiction and editing.

As for the faculty's responsibilities, let's not forget evaluations, those end-of-semester narratives in lieu of grades. In the privacy of their offices, they reviewed the semester's work, drafted and revised them into honest, detailed, and balanced summations of each writer's work. Kirkland students expected no less. That was a true joining of skills. I look back over the list of colleagues, all devoted to guiding our hopeful young writers, while they kept their own energies fresh.

Students and faculty alike also enjoyed informal gatherings that brought members of the community together in more relaxed and celebratory moods: the soirées, the end-of-semester readings by members of the various classes, the cook-outs for graduating seniors.

In a category of its own stands the Watrous literary prize, founded by Esther Watrous Couper, in memory of her father. It yields handsome annual awards in the categories of poetry, fiction, and essay in criticism. I specify that the Watrous prize still "stands," for it has been carried over for inclusion among the Hamilton College prizes and scholarships as another light beam in the Kirkland heritage.

So far, I've avoided naming individual students or faculty involved in the conduct and progress of the Creative Writing Program. At this point, however, I must say some words about Jo Pitkin's role in keeping the memories and reputation alive. In fact, in addition to founding *Red Weather*, Jo played a part in the very survival of the program. When the merger with Hamilton College had everyone on tenterhooks, she and Hamilton student Scott Klein marched into Dean Gulick's office and made their case for the survival of creative writing. I have no doubt that they helped influence the Hamilton English Department to adopt the program entire. Of course, the Kirkland informal settings and evaluations fell by the wayside, but little else faded.

So we may thank Jo for more than her inestimable energies in bringing Kirkland creative writers together in this splendid anthology, as she did for the group reading at the 2007 reunion. Thanks to her commitment and steady energies, the program thrives today as well as it ever had and remains emblematic of the best that Kirkland College offered its people.

Bill Rosenfeld

Nin Andrews

Star

“Exactly,” my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Wilson said, but only once. That day she placed a gold star on my page. The day before she swatted the boy behind me for picking his nose. (*Whap!*) The day before that she sent Anna P. Gibson out in the hall for making squelchy noises with her lips when she dropped pins on the floor. *I can't hear my pins drop!* Mrs. Wilson announced. *But I can hear Anna P. Gibson!* (*Whap-whap!*) Whenever she looked at me, I stared at my feet. I stared at the dented wood on my desktop, the names carved in it. Leah + Ron. I stared at my black-and-white saddle shoes. My white bobby socks. My plaid jumper. (Why is it called a jumper? I'd still like to know.) No matter where I looked, I felt Mrs. Wilson's gaze on my skin. Sometimes she reached down with red fingernails and pushed my hair from my eyes. Sometimes pushed my glasses up my nose. *I want you to see me*, she said. I saw her. I saw Mrs. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson was a giant woman standing on orange heels with tiny points. I wondered how she balanced there. Whenever I looked back at her, she grew bigger. I was afraid of how big she'd grow.

How the Poem Dies

First there are the calculated deaths, performed with precision and forethought, when I play doctor, sliding on a pair of latex gloves and slicing you open, examining every stanza as if it were an alien or a disease until it is one. Of course you return the favor, leaving pieces of me in another town or time zone, my soul in a sock drawer, my black braids in a hotel room in Peoria where I gaze wistfully at the river below.

Next are the silent deaths when we stare at *The Vindicator* on the coffee table, nibbling blueberry scones, the clink of a butter knife the only sound. We are like those married couples who wish to leave each other but never can. Instead we keep eating and sleeping together, each pretending the other doesn't exist. After a while we become mere figments of one another's imagination. We each think the other is the figment.

At last there are the drunken deaths. I wake the neighbors and howl at you and the moon. You accuse me of infidelity, murder, and theft. (It's all true!) Then we make love until we think we will die from too much sex. We die again and again until even death is not enough. We keep coming back to life, searching for that perfect last line, the one that ends all ends. The one where we die with no regrets.

The Other Girl

It was how the doctor said it, statutory rape, that I remember, his words like cold metal on bare skin, his hands wrapped in latex gloves. The nurse kept saying breathe. *Breathe. Don't scream. Hush.* I couldn't help it, I said, biting my lips. Afterward I took so many showers and walks around my ceiling. I was afraid to answer the phone or see anyone who might see me back. Instead I thought of long lists of things I should have done or said, and that girl outside, the one who knew nothing of this. She who would never see or feel as I did. She stayed outside long after that summer day when the dusk bled all over the trees and the darkness bloomed inside me. I knew why they called it statutory then. Unable to move or scream, a statue was what I was. No matter how hard I tried, I could not step outside. I could not find that girl, the one who used to chase down city sidewalks, racing balls and skipping over the cracks in the cement. The one who would never know the thing inside that hurts and screams and aches even as it wants.