

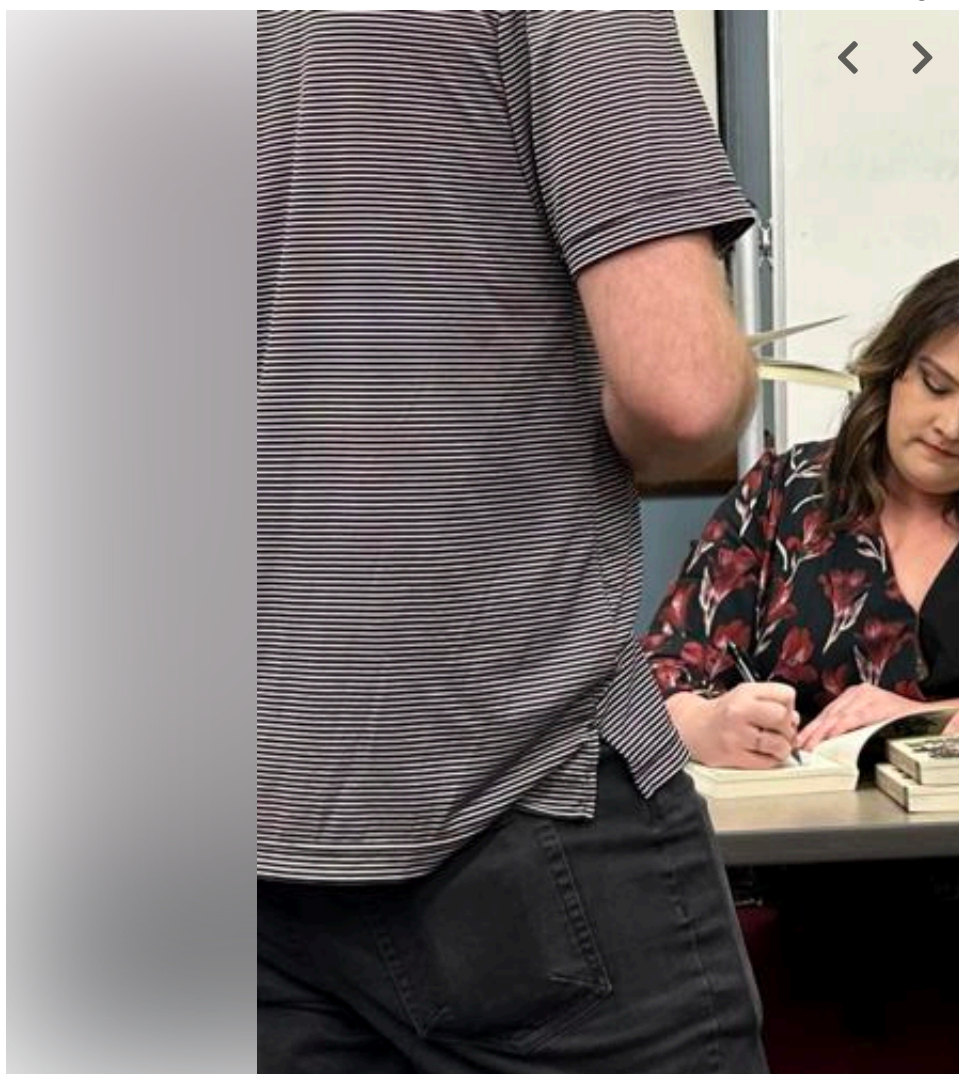
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WKU alum, published author returns to where writing career took flight

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Erin Slaughter, author and graduate of Western Kentucky University's collection "A Manual for How to Love Us" on Thursday night in Cherry H
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A published Hilltopper stopped by her old stomping ground this week to share her writing with students.

Erin Slaughter was a member of the first cohort in WKU's creative writing MFA program, graduating in 2017. She is the editor and co-founder of literary journal "The Hunger" and just finished her PhD at Florida State University.

She said that the time she's spent in Bowling Green this week has "felt like coming home."

"In many ways, (Cherry Hall) is where my life began," Slaughter said. "This is where I met all of the people in my life who are the dearest to me, it's where I learned that I can write a book, it's where I learned all of the different and amazing, wonderful possibilities of what writing can be."

Slaughter published her first collection of short stories, "A Manual for How to Love Us," through Harper Perennial last month.

She refuses to stick to a singular writing discipline. Slaughter has published multiple poetry collections and is currently working on a novel.

"This is a book of wildness and weirdness," Slaughter told students in Cherry Hall Thursday night. "And feral women experiencing grief and coping in strange, unexpected ways."

Some central themes of “A Manual” are gendered violence, the experience of being a woman and relationship dynamics between women and men.

“In this book particularly, something that I’m exploring is: women are often not allowed to speak out when something hurts them or when they’re experiencing uncomfortable or unwieldy emotions,” Slaughter said. “They’re also not usually allowed to express anger.”

The book also delves into the genre of magical realism, a personal fascination for Slaughter.

“I think I like weird stuff, that’s part of it, and I think that the contrast between the supernatural, the strange, the magical and a real-world setting heightens the weirdness of the magical realism,” she said. “I’m constantly trying to work out in my own life whether or not I can believe in magic, and whether magic is something we create on our own in the world or if it does exist somewhere cosmically.”

Slaughter’s first foray into writing came during undergrad, back when she was a sophomore neuroscience student.

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Sermon Titles:

SUNDAY 10:30 am	The Spirit Within
SUNDAY Gathering	Questions TBA
SUNDAY 5:00 pm	The Spirit of Community
SUNDAY GATHERING	Questions TBA
MONDAY 10:00 am	The Spirit in Action
MONDAY GATHERING	Questions TBA



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“I was not having a good time in college and I didn't have any friends and I was very lost,” she said. “... I knew I wanted my life to be something different than what it was, but I also felt that I had to choose a career that was very safe.”

That changed when Slaughter stumbled onto some of Richard Siken’s poetry when browsing Pinterest. She immediately ordered “Crush,” his first poetry collection.

“I sat and read the book while sitting on the living room floor of my apartment, and then I spent the next three days just writing almost manically, writing poetry,” Slaughter said. “And decided then that I wanted to pursue writing and that I was going to make that hard choice.”

That relentless pursuit led Slaughter, a native of north Texas, to Bowling Green and eventually to Tallahassee, Florida, for her PhD.

She enjoyed a supportive writing community at FSU and grew as a writer more than she ever could have expected, but also wrestled with things like imposter syndrome and critiques rooted in sexism.

“I experienced, in my program, some resistance to my style of writing and the things I liked in writing, and I think I lost my wide-eyed innocence about the writing world during that time,” She said. “Some of which was necessary and some of which was not.”

There would be times when men in the program would discount her work as too emotional, or that her feelings were not worth writing about. Slaughter found she was not only female author who has received that kind of treatment.

Her dissertation was composed of her poetry collection “The Sorrow Festival” as well as a critical component of scholarly research on its themes and inspirations. In this case, her focus was on women’s confessional writing.

“Through some research about how this has played out historically over time, and the misogyny that is built into the DNA of academia and into the way we talk about writing and poetry specifically, that helped validate what I was going through,” Slaughter said. “Because I was like ‘oh this has been (going on) forever’, it’s not just people in my program now, this is a thing that’s been happening since the 1800s.”

Those experiences were a bit creatively scarring for Slaughter, but she said that writing "A Manual" was “a really big part of bouncing back from that.”

David Bell, author and interim director of WKU’s MFA program, said he knew Slaughter was going to do great things.

“I keep saying I don’t know how much I really taught her because she already knew what was going on, but I’m very happy for her because I know she’s worked very hard at her writing and I think it’s just the very beginning of the great things she’s going to accomplish,” he said.

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