

Remund Shares Poetry At Artists/Authors Series

BY SARAH WETZEL
For the Plain Talk

Tuesday evening the Vermillion Public Library held its final Artists/Authors Series presentation for the fall as Marcella Remund from the University of South Dakota's Department of English shared her poetry.

The library hosts an artist or author the first Tuesday of the month for most of the year and will pick up again in the Spring.

Other presentations take place regularly at the library such as the 'Long Overdue' series which includes screenings and discussions.

"This month we will be screening the PBS online special 'Being Mortal' as a follow up to the book discussion that we've finished over the past few weeks," Adult Programming Coordinator Susan Heggstad announced prior to Remund's presentation.

According to Heggstad there will also be two more of the regular hands-on workshops including a Calligraphy workshop Saturday.

"We are so lucky to have this library and all that they do here," Remund commented.

Remund shared how her love of poetry began growing up in Omaha, Nebraska.

"I was surrounded by poetry in one form or another," she said. "I can remember my mother or grandmother always singing or reciting nursery rhymes or forcing us to learn songs in rounds.

I can remember writing my first poem when I was four or five. It was a eulogy for a dead bird that my friend found. I wouldn't let her throw the bird away until I had written the eulogy and we had a very serious funeral for the little bird."

Unlike some poets, Remund said she doesn't consciously try to write about specific topics.

Even so, she said she has noticed certain themes which frequent her writing.

Firstly, women and their relation-



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK

Local poet Marcella Remund was the final fall presentation of the Vermillion Public Library's Artists/Authors Series this week.

ships.

"I grew up in the city and moved straight to a farm 16 miles north of Vermillion where I was pretty sure wild animals would eat me," she said. "Maybe because of that perception I'm really interested in the image of rural women, women in isolation and women who are silenced in one way or another. Also women who find ways to get by on their own or make it on their own."

Other frequent topics include flight and dieting.

"I've been on every diet that's ever been invented and of course none of them work," Remund commented.

Several of Remund's poems she chose to read Tuesday focused on dieting or the failure thereof drawing chuckles and sometimes full laughter from those attending.

The final topic Remund highlighted was Catholic Saints.

"I have to kind of preface that by saying I'm not Catholic and I don't consider myself a particularly religious person but I'm fascinated

by the idea of ritual," she said. "I'm really interested in ritual and the comfort it seems to give people including me. I have quite an elaborate ritual of making coffee in the morning that doesn't ever change. Whether it's making coffee or celebrating the coming of age of a child, I think those rituals help us name parts of ourselves. For me at least, the Saints become reflections of aspects of ourselves."

Being a teacher has definitely influenced her work.

"I would say teaching creative writing informs my work because I catch myself doing many things that I tell my students not to do," she said. "So it's a really good system of checks and balances for my own work. Also I think teaching makes you more compassionate. It's not an easy job. I might have a little slower pacing in my poems because it's such a treat to do it between grading. I don't want to stop doing it and get back to grading. Because I'm working on vocabulary all the time with students I'm more aware of the sounds and the effects of words."

There is no actual form Remund follows when writing a poem.

"I don't have a process," she said. "Number one, I'm a lazy writer. I love when writers say they get up at five every morning and write for two hours. I think, 'Oh I should do that' but I never do. I'll sit down and write if I have an idea and the ideas come from anywhere. Sometimes I'll overhear a piece of conversation or I'll see something, I'll hear a song or I'll drop something in the dishwasher. It could be anything then I'll sit down and write. I don't know if there's any process involved except work. There's never any big ball of inspiration. It's always like, look at this skeleton key, what are you going to do?"

There is one aspect of her writing that is always present though a specific process is not.

"I am a compulsive reviser," Remund said. "For one thing, I never

write things in the right order. In grad school I would write a paper that was 12 pages long then I'd have to go back and cut all the paragraphs apart and move them all around. When I write a poem I'll get all those ideas on there and I'll move the lines around. It's more like I'm a line writer. I can get a line which could be connected to another line but they might not be next to each other. I have never ever written a poem that was done right away."

The revising continues constantly according to Remund.

"I would tinker with them till the bitter end," she said. "I tinkered with some of these poems before tonight and some have been published."

Though sometimes she remains unsatisfied, Remund says sometimes it's for the best to stop.

"I think we're all overly self-critical," she said. "Sometimes I'll pull a poem out to read and think, who wrote that? So sometimes I have to leave them alone so I don't kill them completely."

Ideas for Remund's poetry, she said, stems from simple curiosity.

"I am slightly compulsive about many things," she said. "One of the things I'm compulsive about is I want to know everything. It's impossible of course but I want to know everything. There's just so much. The bird image came because I raised birds for a while because I wanted to know how that process worked. So I got a pair of parakeets, a cage a nest box and off we went. I wanted to see that work. When they were molting I scraped their wing feathers with my thumbnail to see what that felt like. I think it's just curiosity."

Not only is poetry work, but it is also a welcome relief according to Remund.

"Writing is just a really nice way to be able to have a conversation with yourself," she said. "It's socially acceptable self-talk. It's certainly

self-exploration for me. I'm trying to figure things out. I'm trying to figure out the world. Poetry is such beautiful, condensed language. It's not prose that goes on and on. I can't write prose. Poetry is so boiled down and desperate."

Those wishing to explore the field of poetry should dig a little deeper than the surface before they make a judgment according to Remund.

"The most important thing is to read poetry," she said. "The styles of poetry is such a broad range. I think what happens a lot of times is people read one poet or two poets and they don't like it. I would say keep reading poetry until you hit on a poet's work you really love. Then read as much of it as you can find."

Remund also dispelled the myth that poetry writing is a solitary activity.

"I think maybe that's true for some poets but for people that want to get into writing poetry you have to be around other people who are struggling to write poetry," she said. "I would say find a writer's group."

Vermillion has a writer's group that meets here the first and third Monday of every month at 6:30. People from all different experience levels get together and read each other's work. I think you just need to be exposed. It's like anything else.

If you wanted to learn piano you would need to be around pianos, you would need to be around piano teachers, you would need exposure. I got into it seriously because there's an American poet named Ai. Her real name is Francis something, something but she published under the name Ai. I read a couple of her poems. Then I got every Ai book ever published and read everything five times. Just immerse yourself."

To become more familiar with Remund's work or to purchase her book, 'Finger Bones and other relics', visit her blog at uncanneryou.blogspot.com.

Walk

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lic Relations at Sanford, Vermillion. "This is the first year we're doing one more on awareness of childhood cancer."

The walk will go from Sanford Vermillion to the Dakota Dome Tailgate.

"The first 60 people who preregister will get a complimentary ticket to the football game," said Merrigan. "That's a great fun thing to offer our walk participants and we appreciate the athletic department at USD allowing us to do that and providing us those tickets."

With registration at 11

a.m. and the walk beginning at 11:30 a.m., participants should get to the Dome with time to spare.

"We get all our participants together in a big group picture," Merrigan said. "Hopefully we'll have a banner that can be part of that picture. The walk will start from here and end up at the Dome. It's an easy walk, about 1.1 miles is what I tracked it last year at. Most people should get to the Dome parking lot in plenty of time for the game so they can hang out at the tailgate for a while and head into the game."

As of earlier this week 25 people were registered for the walk with this number expected to grow.

Though the walk honors

all children and their families fighting cancer, one local child will be honored through this event.

"Brave Kids Bold Cures is part of Sanford Children's effort trying to raise awareness of pediatric oncology programs and services that they offer," Merrigan said. "The young lady that we are honoring, Cameron Walter, is a little girl here in Vermillion who has been battling cancer for just about three years now so we're excited to also honor Cameron and cheer her on as she has gone through so much, she and her family, in the past couple of years."

Walter and her family will most likely be in attendance at the walk Saturday.

"We also have some an-

nouncements made during the game honoring Cameron and talking about the Brave Kids Bold Cures Walk," Merrigan said. "We're looking forward to that as well. We want as many community members as possible to join us. The walk is more of a community building aspect than a fundraiser, bringing everyone together and a celebrating side of it for Cameron especially. We're hopeful to get some free will donations from those participating. We will have some fun t-shirts available for sale. Some will be here at the beginning of the walk and the rest will be for sale

at the end of the walk at Tailgate Nation in the Dakota Dome parking lot.

"It's about coming together, it's about awareness, it's about being together as a community and trying to fight childhood cancer in any way we can," Merrigan continued. "So all the funds we raise through the t-shirt sales and free will donations, we'll also have wristbands and a couple of other items, all that money will be donated back to the Sanford Health program to benefit the pediatric oncology program. It's a great awareness cause and we're excited about the new theme."

Those interested in participating in the walk can preregister by contacting Jill Christopherson at 605-638-8465 or jill.christopherson@sanfordhealth.org or simply show up for registration at 11 a.m. at Sanford Vermillion on 102 S. Plum St. through the Administration entrance.

The walk begins at 11:30 at the corner of Main and Plum Street.

Volunteers to line the walk route are also welcome and should contact Christopherson as soon as possible.

TEDx

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someone to connect with.

Arens himself is excited for one speaker in particular.

"I'm excited for Frank Leibfarth to come because I'm a chemistry major and that's his specialty is chemistry and he's studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which is one of the best schools in the country for chemistry," he said. "I just think it will be a great experience to hear him. Also kind of get to know him and how he did it. He did come from USD a few years back so it's great to see USD alumni going out and doing exciting things."

Arens chose the speakers after consulting various individuals on campus.

"There were quite a few other names too that weren't able to make it due to scheduling conflicts," he said. "We ended up getting this group of people because they were all suggestions from faculty on campus. In addition, they have diverse backgrounds and we want to have a wide range of topics to explore at the event."

The speakers themselves have chosen the topics on which they will speak according to Arens.

"We didn't want to push them to speak on one thing or another so we let them choose what they are speaking on and what they're most familiar and comfortable with," he said. "TED does have some basic rules on topics. They don't want you to speak for some type of corporation to promote their products. People speaking can't promote their businesses, same with religion. They can't promote

one religious belief over another. They can talk about religion in a more general sense and discuss specific religions but they can't appear to be promoting it from the stage. Basic things like that. None of the speakers are doing that."

Arens and his team have been working since May to put this event together.

The tickets were gone in just 12 hours according to Arens, mostly to students but a few community members.

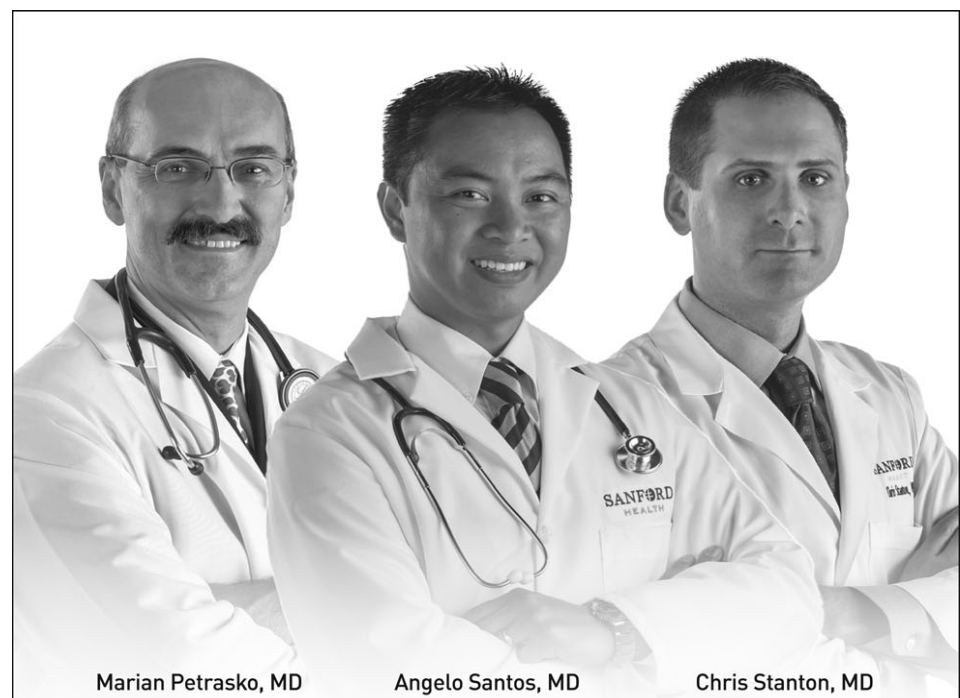
"I think there's just a lot of interest," he said. "We've also been advertising a lot on our social media pages. I think with our generation

we're really interested in TED. It's something we're all familiar with. The students were just excited to see it on campus."

To Arens, this type of event embodies what USD itself stands for.

"I hope [people] realize there's a lot of different ways to look at things and sometimes a different perspective can really help in accomplishing things," he said. "Especially since USD prides itself in providing a liberal arts education, that's kind of a key, having familiarity in a diverse range of topics."

For more information visit tedxusd.com.



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