



Edwardsville Poet and SIUE Professor Receives Major Writing Recognition

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - Longtime Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) professor Allison Funk was named a Guggenheim Fellow last year, one of only five poets to receive that prestigious recognition in 2022.

One year later and another [fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council](#) under her belt, Funk is reflecting on her career as a professor and poet as she gathers her poems into a new collection that connects grief, womanhood and nature. A self-described “old feminist,” Funk noted that this book feels especially poignant at this point in her career, which started at a time when very few women were published.

“We look for models,” Funk said. “Obviously, all women are not alike, but there is some commonality in terms of our life experiences. That was especially important to me when I was young, to have my own sort of authorized in some way...We have to write out of our own bodies and our own experiences, to a large degree.”

Funk studied classic poets in college, which she enjoyed, but it was difficult to find writing that reflected her own experience. It was the 1960s, when women still had to fight to publish their writing. This hunger for contemporary and feminist poetry spurred Funk to write her own.

The poet Elizabeth Bishop was nearing the end of her career; future Nobel prize winner Louise Glück was just starting hers. Funk credits both of them as major influences. She read their poetry while working in investigative journalism, then left the field to pursue a master’s of fine arts degree at Columbia University in New York City.

From 1990–2017, Funk taught in the English department at SIUE and wrote poetry in her spare time. She has published six books of poetry, and her work has been widely anthologized. She noted her gratitude for the ways that teaching and writing intersected throughout her career as a professor.

“My work at Edwardsville has been the most fulfilling teaching that I’ve had in my career,” Funk said. “I got wonderful support from the university in terms of my writing from the very beginning. They were tremendously supportive...These two grants reflect, to some extent, on the goodness of my university.”

When she was recognized by the [John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation](#) as a Guggenheim Fellow in 2022, Funk proposed a book that will include previously published work alongside her most recent poems. She is using both the Guggenheim and Illinois Arts Council fellowships to fund her writing.

All poetry is personal to the poet, but this latest book is particularly intimate. After losing her husband at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Funk spent hours walking through the [Watershed Nature Center](#) in Edwardsville. She began to recognize herself in the marsh, which she called “a liminal space.”

“When you suffer a real loss, there’s a sense of having no idea where you are for a long time,” Funk explained. “I was a wife; now I’m a widow. He was here; now he’s dead...Wetlands are places where they’re not altogether water and they’re not altogether land. They’re the in-between places. I found myself feeling that the wetland was a metaphor for this in-between place where we might be grieving.”

“Wetland: New and Selected Poems” will be finished sometime in the next year, Funk estimates. Her goal is that this book will encapsulate the main themes of her career and feel as meaningful to readers as it is to her. Funk discovered Bishop and Glück’s poetry when she most needed it; she hopes that others will find the same sense of recognition in her work.

“I think that we all probably struggle to be seen and to see ourselves as having value,” Funk said. “In particular, the challenges that many women face in terms of seeing themselves and being seen...how to value yourself, how to construct yourself in a complicated life that involves other people that you care about...That’s the sort of human condition that I explore.”

A catalog of Funk’s work and recognitions is available at [her website](#).