

Replacing grief and death with humor and sex

Film depicts awkward and humorous way of reinventing oneself



COURTESY OF KATHLEEN CAPRARIO

Kathleen Caprario was able to deal with her grief and empower herself through classes at LCC.

ARUNIMA BHATTACHARJEE
REPORTER

Meeting men at their wives' funerals in order to sleep with them seems wrong, but in the short comedy film "Mourning After," three women do just that and find romance in a humorously awkward way.

This short film about death, sex and self-acceptance was written and produced by Kathleen Caprario-Ulrich, a studio arts faculty member at Lane Community College. It was produced in collaboration with the Shaggy Dog Project, an ongoing filmmaking workshop in Eugene. Caprario discovered Shaggy Dog after attending a screenwriting workshop at the Eugene International Film Festival in 2011.

The movie is about a woman in her 50s named Marlitt who moves in with her mother after losing her husband. Marlitt's mother, Jean, is in her 70s and has a very active social and sex life. She meets men at their wives' funerals and sleeps with them. Jean shares this idea with Marlitt and her other daughter, Carlie, and advises them to do the same.

"It would be absolutely disgusting to do something like that in real life," Caprario said. "I could never do something like that, but could I create characters that could? So I got the idea of the show."

Caprario is a mother, teacher, creative artist, stand-up comedian and now a screenplay writer and

film producer. When in her mid 20s, she met her future husband James Ulrich in Manhattan. In 1977 they both moved to Eugene.

"My husband wanted to move out here in Eugene. He wanted to come west to be a painter and I followed him," Caprario said. "I knew I wanted to go somewhere; I wanted to do something different. So we came here and built a life together and had our son."

Tragically, in October 2001, she lost her husband, while her son was just a teenager. After going through years of therapy she felt the need to do something big and different with her life.

In 2010 she received a grant from the Faculty Professional Development fund to go to Australia for four weeks to participate in the Story Writing in Remote Locations program. There she met an Aboriginal artist named Eileen Bonney, who inspired her to make a big change in her life. Caprario returned from the trip with a renewed sense of excitement in her work.

Caprario took a comedy class at LCC through continuing education. "It seemed to depower the grief and empower me. That was a great thing. I started thinking about the ridiculousness of everything," Caprario said. Soon after, she came up with the idea of "Mourning After."

"I knew the last part of my healing puzzle was to laugh at death. I had to take the power away from death and grief. I had to laugh at it and even be crude about it," Caprario said.

The first scene of the movie was shot at the LCC Ceramics Studio on May 5, 2013. Several students in the ceramics class were extras in that scene. Second year multimedia design student Katrina Vollbracht edited the final version of the film. Media Arts instructor, Mel Stark, did the audio mixing and Theater Arts Instructor, Judith "Sparky" Roberts acted in the film.

"Kathleen made her characters very empathetic. They do things that are not super moral, but it is very much a women's film," Vollbracht said. "It is about women and their relationship with each other and their relationships with the world. It's cool and refreshing because there isn't very much of that in the film industry."

LCC media arts instructor Jan Halvorsen advised and encouraged Caprario throughout the writing and production of the film. "We've got a lot of talented filmmakers in this city," Halvorsen said. "This film is a funny, unusual story. It's a little weird. It puts people in a situation which is unexpected and interesting. All of this makes you want to follow the story."

Caprario was awarded a grant from the Faculty Professional Development Short-Term Leave fund to attend the non-juried Short Film Corner, along with her film, at this year's 67th Cannes Film Festival in France in May, 2014.

"Mourning After" will be shown at the 2014 Eugene International Film Festival on Nov. 8 at 7 p.m. at the Regal Cinemas Valley River Center location.

Teacher reaches students through film

Racism exposed in a compelling light

DANIEL ROARK
REPORTER

The Global Health and Sustainability course, taught by instructor Susie Cousar, is aimed at increasing students' knowledge and awareness of global sustainability and the health consequences related to poverty, social status and global economic systems.

Cousar was inspired to teach by her father, a middle school teacher who went on to become a high school principal. She received her Masters of Science degree at Oregon State University in 1992, majoring in Health Education with an emphasis on environmental health and health behavior. She calls Eugene and Lane Community College her home and has no plans to move.

Her Oct. 21 class featured a film titled "The Color of Fear," with intermittent lecture discussion. In the film, seven American men of differing ethnicities and backgrounds talk of racism and

how it affects society. The film shows the problem from different perspectives and how empathy can create a deep conscience, as related by each man.

In the film, an African-American man speaks of discrimination in early America. He believes that the concept of racism, based on skin color, originated in America. He tells of the early European settlers and their self-proclaimed superiority because they were white. When the slaves were brought over from Africa, he said, they too were indoctrinated with this belief.

The film covers subjects such as how skin color would determine a slave's job. Often, the very dark-skinned slaves received the hardest and most laborious tasks, such as field-work. The lighter skinned slaves, especially the females, received easier assignments, such as housework. They would also receive more privileges. Some of the lighter skinned slaves even became oppressors themselves. Under orders from their masters, they would dole out punishment and

torment to the darker-skinned people. But all of them believed what the white man said.

Cousar stopped the film periodically to make comments. She pointed out that fear is sometimes a conditioned response. She said that children under the age of three are often drawn to the color pink when shown the full color spectrum. Around the age of three, however, most of the boys repel this color. The only explanation, she said, is that they were taught, probably by a parent, that pink is a girl's color and that girls are different. This is the same as fearing someone because of the color of their skin, Cousar said.

She quoted Albert Einstein, one of her heroes, "Knowledge is power but imagination is more important." Cousar explained that stories help people, much like a Shaman relates the lessons of life and how humans are closely connected to earth and nature. "Without imagination, we are doomed to continue with what we already know, even if it's not working and/or destructive,"



AMANDA IRVIN / THE TORCH

Susie Cousar teaches a Global Health and Sustainability class in addition to First Aid Classes on Monday, Oct. 20.

she said.

Cousar's colleague and good friend, Stan Taylor, teaches Environmental Politics, a course focusing on solving environmental problems from a grassroots perspective. "Susie Cousar is an

inspirational teacher, awakening students in her Global Health class to the fact that issues of social and environmental justice are directly related to our health as individuals and communities," Taylor said.