

Librarian's Shelf by Kelli Keyes

Willa Cather presented by Steve Shively

Willa Cather was born Wilella Silbert Cather on December 7, 1873 in Gore, Virginia. When she was nine years old, her family moved to Nebraska. They settled in Red Cloud, where Cather would attend school and graduate. Her father opened a real estate office and her mother was a teacher. Willa Cather was the oldest of seven children. From her Red Cloud neighbors, Cather learned the love of music and literature. One neighbor, Mrs. Wiener, gave Cather complete access to her large personal library. Another neighbor, Mrs. Miner, played the piano for Cather, introducing her to the beloved classics.

Even the people of Red Cloud could see that Willa Cather was a "genius" child. She was curious, active, and outgoing. As an adolescent, she befriended the local doctors and showed an interest in medicine. She cut her hair short, started dressing more like a man, and referred to herself as "William" Cather, M.D. In 1890, at the age of sixteen, she graduated with hopes of becoming a doctor.

After graduating, Willa Cather moved to Lincoln to attend the University of Nebraska to learn more about medicine. When an English teacher submitted Cather's essay and it was published in the Lincoln Journal, Cather decided to become a writer. During her five years at the University, Cather supported herself as a journalist.

Returning to Red Cloud, Nebraska after graduating from the university, Cather hired on as editor for the "Home Monthly" magazine and moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From there she went on to edit other magazines and to author her famous books and poems. You might recognize some of these titles: "O Pioneers!", "The Song of the Lark", "My Antonia", and "Death Comes for the Archbishop". During the 1920's she made a name for herself as a leading American author.

On April 24, 1947, when Cather was 73, she died from a cerebral hemorrhage. She was living in Manhattan, New York at the time with her friend Edith Lewis, whom she appointed her literary executor. Historically documented as a complex and brilliant person, Willa Cather lives on through her many readers.

This brief little article about Willa Cather is intended to whet your appetite for more. English Emeritus Professor, Steve Shively, is coming to the Columbus Public Library on Sunday, September 22 at 2 pm to talk about our Nebraska heritage in Willa Cather's writings. Steve grew up in Columbus, Nebraska, graduated from Columbus High School, and went on to teach high school and college. He has just retired from Utah State University after 42 years of teaching. A great supporter of schools and libraries, Steve Shively returns to Columbus to share his knowledge of Willa Cather and her writings. He has even offered to reach out to the local schools and come give talks about Willa Cather or other authors for gratis. Teachers, maybe you could offer extra credit to students who attend the Willa Cather program! All are welcome and there is no charge for attending. The Friends of the Library are hosting this Willa Cather program sponsored by Carrol and Jane Novicki.