

The Power of Narrative: A Memorial for Dr. Minnie Bruce Pratt

C.C. Hendricks

C.C. Hendricks is an Assistant Professor and Director of First-Year Writing in the Communication Arts & Sciences department and core faculty member of the Women's and Gender Studies department at the University of New Hampshire. She is a mom and feminist rhetorician. She has held Writing Program Administrative positions and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Rhetoric and Composition and English Education. C.C. has also served as a consultant in writing centers and a Writing Across the Curriculum program. Her work has appeared in *Peitho*, *The WAC Journal*, *Across the Disciplines*, *Composition Studies*, *Peitho*, and edited collections. She is currently working on a book-length recovery project of Diane di Prima's feminist rhetoric.

Keywords: Pratt; memorial; feminist; narrative; creative non-fiction; voice

I met Dr. Pratt in the summer of 2016 during the first year of my doctoral coursework in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program at Syracuse University. That summer, Dr. Pratt was teaching an Advanced Creative Nonfiction (CNF) course. Reluctant to take any course that required me to write personally, I was not going to pass up the opportunity to take a class with the Minnie Bruce Pratt. I was already an admirer of her work and activism and countless graduate students in my program had described her course as “transformative.” In fact, many discovered their dissertation project in her course. I entered the first class meeting a bit skeptical of CNF but eager to learn from a legend. Dr. Pratt slowly ate away at my skepticism with daily writing exercises that amounted to hundreds of pages over the eight-week course. Scared to be vulnerable or to share something that would out me as the impostor I felt like, my writing remained performative over the first few weeks. I began the course trying to write in a way that I thought would impress Dr. Pratt.

As a working class, first-generation woman in the South, I was raised to not share my dirty laundry or negative feelings with people I didn't know very well. Everything is always “fine” in front of “company.” With direct but generous guidance, Dr. Pratt helped me see the power in my own voice, the value in my own story, and how to confront my own limitations and biases as a writer and reader. By the end of the course, I had used the daily writing exercises and larger assignments to begin to process the crushing grief I felt after my father's death the year before. In addition to the personal impact of taking her course, Dr. Pratt helped me unlearn the fabricated boundaries between research and narrative, theory and reflection, and academic and personal writing that I had been taught. The reading, writing, and collaborating I did in her course irrevocably changed the scholar and teacher I am today. Once staunchly resistant to personal narrative, reflection and feminist storytelling are central in all my scholarship today. Looking back at my final

reflection from the course now, I feel overwhelmingly grateful to have been able to study with her: “Writing in this way seems more powerful than I ever imagined. My own identity as a ‘strong woman’ is being tested by my surveys into the past, into my memories. Writing like this becomes a way for me to parse through the outside voices to truly find and exercise my own.”

It’s impossible to capture what we’ve lost with Dr. Pratt’s passing, just as it’s impossible to capture her lasting impact on so, so many. Rest in power, Dr. Pratt, and thank you, truly thank you, for everything.