

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

5-4-2018

GWU Alumna Finds Success as American Sign Language Interpreter and Christian Fiction Author

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

GWU Alumna Finds Success as American Sign Language Interpreter and Christian Fiction Author

 webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/gwu-alumna-finds-success-as-american-sign-language-interpreter-and-christian-fiction-author/

Office of University
Communications

May 4, 2018

Miriam Downing Thor '12 Works in N.C. School System, Set to Publish First Novella

Miriam Downing Thor, a 2012 alumna of Gardner-Webb University, has a career she loves and is also pursuing her dream to become a published author. An American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter for Moore County Schools in Carthage, N.C., Thor recently signed with Anaiah Press to publish her first Christian novella, “Her First Noel.”

Miriam Downing Thor at computer

Thor was in second grade when she discovered she had a talent for writing stories. “My teacher encouraged me to keep writing to my heart’s content. So I did, and I still do,” she shared.

She also discovered her interest in sign language when she was in elementary school. “A deaf girl attended my church, and a couple of ladies taught a children’s sign language class to help us communicate with her,” she explained. “While I was in high school, one of those ladies taught a beginner’s ASL class. I developed a passion for sign language and felt like God wanted me to pursue something related to signing as my career. In addition, I have always enjoyed teaching children, so I chose to major in elementary education as well, hoping to combine the two in some way.”

Originally from Zachary, La., Thor started searching for a Christian college that offered a major in ASL. “Gardner-Webb was one of the only Christian universities I found,” she said. “After praying about it, I was sure I wanted to attend Gardner-Webb.”

Miriam Downing Thor signing

Being on campus with others who loved ASL and shared her Christian faith was inspiring. She attended the student-led worship service regularly and joined FOCUS—a campus ministry involving teams of students who lead youth retreats locally and regionally. She was also a member of Joyful Hands, GWU’s sign language choir. “I feel like all of these activities helped me to grow in my faith,” Thor affirmed. “I also went on a mission trip to Honduras during my senior year, an experience I will always treasure.”

Academically, Thor developed skills as an interpreter, teacher and critical thinker. “In my classes at Gardner-Webb, I learned almost all of the sign language that I use daily and how to interpret,” she asserted. “My education classes also prepared me for working in the public school system.”

One of her favorite professors was Instructor Bob Moore, who used humor to keep his classes lively. He also taught ASL Literature and Folklore, a perfect combination of her interests. Other professors who influenced her were Dr. Danielle Robertson in the School of Education and Dr. Tom Jones and Dr. Venita Totten in the Department of Natural Sciences. “My experience in Dr. Robertson’s class helped me the most when I actually got into the classroom,” Thor revealed. “Dr. Jones and Dr. Totten were passionate about the subjects they taught and made them interesting. Knowing oceanography, meteorology and chemistry has been helpful. I have used the knowledge I gained from those classes while doing my job as an interpreter.”

Find more information about Thor’s book at [Anaiah Press](#) and on her author [website](#).