In Memoriam: Aurelie Sheehan

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Aurelie Sheehan, professor of creative writing and former head of the Department of English, has died at age 60.

Sheehan, who was born in Verdun, France, joined the University faculty in 2000. She spent nearly five years as head of the Department of English before stepping down from that position in December.

Her passing is a significant loss for the department and campus community, said Cristina D. Ramírez, associate professor and current head of the Department of English.

"She was an excellent mentor to me and many others. Her words, teaching, leadership and joyful humor made this department a better place," Ramírez said. "Along with the many books she wrote and awards she received, her dedication to her students – graduate and undergraduate – as well as to the faculty stands out among the many great contributions of her generous life and spirit to this world. She will be sorely missed."

Sheehan was a prolific writer, having published several books, including the novels "The Anxiety of Everyday Objects" and "History Lesson for Girls" and the collection of short stories "Jack Kerouac is Pregnant."

"She touched many, many lives here and everywhere she went," a statement from the department that was posted on the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Facebook page[1] says. "She has also reached many souls through her unparalleled books. Please read them again."

In honor of Sheehan's work at the University and her impact on students, the Department of English is establishing the Aurelie Sheehan Memorial Scholarship in Creative Writing, dedicated to supporting undergraduates majoring in creative writing. The scholarship, led by a gift from Sheehan's husband, Reed Karaim, is designed to amplify emerging writers and contribute to their success in the field. Supporters can donate to the fund online[2] through the University of Arizona Foundation. Details of the scholarship are still being finalized.

Sheehan is survived by her husband, Reed Karaim; a daughter, Alexandra Karaim; her mother, Valerie Harms; and a brother, Alex "Pippa" Sheehan. The family will hold a memorial in October, with a celebration of Sheehan's life and work at the University, organized by the Department of English, to follow. Details will be announced as they become available.

Friends, family, students and colleagues are being asked to share stories and memories of Sheehan[3], some of which will be collected into a chapbook and distributed at the celebration of life.

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