

Famed Author Visits a Class of Writing Students

By: Minnie Bardenhagen

It was an incredible opportunity for the North Ed Writers Studio when they got to meet renowned author, Jeannette Walls, on May 3rd, 2023. Known for her memoir, *The Glass Castle*, Walls has just released her new novel, titled *Hang The Moon*, in March. Previously, she had worked in journalism as a gossip columnist. The students at Writers Studio had just transitioned into their fiction unit when Walls paid a visit. She answered questions about her work in fiction, non-fiction, journalism, and gave mountains of passionate advice.

She spoke on her transition from journalism to writing a memoir, stating, "In journalism, I was a truth seeker." The advice she gave the students helped them tremendously with their fiction projects. A message that she made sure to leave the students with is how similar fiction and non-fiction can be; "The best fiction uses the tools of non-fiction." Walls used her experience in journalism to strengthen her fiction writing, "The best fiction is deeply observed and researched. Borrowing from real life is what keeps it alive."

Her memoir required vulnerability beyond measure, and from that experience she was able to share many inspiring tips with the young writers. Walls encouraged them to dive into places that spark emotion, "Just put it out there." While it may be uncomfortable or scary, that's where the best ideas come from. "Shine a light in those dark corners, and that's where you'll find your jewels," She said. When discussing what to write about, she told the students, "Write about something that obsesses you," and to, "Consider, what's your purpose? Why are you doing it?"

"I could relate to her," said Reegan Craker, a Suttons Bay junior and a first-year student in the Writers Studio program, "I am not alone in my struggles." In addition, Craker learned a lot about writing, "I can be petty and I can be angry, and I can turn that into a book."

Alicia Streeter, a Traverse City Central junior and Writers Studio first-year student, took away a similar message, "You have to write about your own experiences."