

Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen again.

The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.
- O Pioneers!

There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.

Cather captures spirit of the prairie

True pioneer conveys Nebraska to the rest of the world

BY DANELL MCCOY
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Editor's note: In this weekly series, we explore the lives and works of notable Nebraska artists of the 20th century.

In the book "My Antonia," Willa Cather described the Nebraska prairie by saying: "As I looked about me I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea. The red grass made all the great prairie the colour of wine stains ... And there was so much motion in it, the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running."
 With this type of poetic description, Cather has become one of the greatest Nebraskan authors of the 20th century.
 "Cather's work has such lucidity and simplicity," said Sue Rosowski, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln English professor. "But her writing combines shining lucidity with resonated depth and concentration."
 Chelsea Schlievert, a senior English major at UNL, agrees. Schlievert is working on an honors thesis about how Cather's experiences are reflected in her writing.
 "Cather speaks with a sense of place. She uses her own experiences and brings those out in her writing," she said.

Cather, who began her writing career in 1891, was born in the home of her maternal grandmother in western Virginia. When Cather was 9 years old, she and her family moved to a family farm near Red Cloud. It was then that Cather's love affair with the rolling prairies of Nebraska began.
 "When Cather immigrated, she was at just the right age," Rosowski said. "She was old enough for this location to make an impact on her and to keep that impact fresh in her mind."
 Rosowski, who is an Adele Hall Distinguished Professor of English at UNL, believes that by immigrating here, Cather got an impression of the state's beauty that most Nebraska natives take for granted.
 "She invites us to really pay attention to what is so ordinary in our lives. She rose to the challenge of seeing this place and being able to give that experience to her readers," Rosowski said.
 In Cather's younger years, she became very interested in medicine and tagged along with doctors as they made house calls.
 She also adored the town's opera house and would act in some of the town's productions.
 A non-conformist, Cather preferred to wear pants and suspenders and kept her hair short. In plays performed in the Opera House, Cather would play a boy.

Cather graduated from high school in 1890 and was the only student out of the three in her graduating class who intended to pursue a college career.
 The following September, Cather began attending classes at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.
 Although she had come to the university intending to study medicine and science, her career goal changed in March 1891.
 One of Cather's professors was so impressed by an essay she had written that he sent it to the town's paper, then called the Journal, without her knowledge.
 After seeing her work in print, Cather changed her concentration to writing and forgot about medicine.
 Over the next two years, Cather produced more than 300 pieces of essay-length stories for the Journal. Because of her extensive knowledge of literature and drama, she also became the Journal's drama critic.
 By the time Cather graduated from UNL in 1895, she had a vast experience in the writing field.
 When she was 22, she received her first big break.
 Cather was offered a job at a magazine in Pittsburgh called Home Monthly. After a year at the magazine, she began writing for the Pittsburgh Leader.
 She continued her newspaper career until 1901. After that, she began to teach.

Cather taught Latin and English at a high school in Pittsburgh for five years. During that time, McClure's began printing Cather's stories. McClure's offered to publish Cather's works in book form, so she moved to New York to begin working for the magazine. While working there, she had little time for her own writing, and after six years, Cather resigned to focus on her own work.
 Her first novel, "Alexander's Bridge," was published not long after.
 In 1913, "O Pioneers!" was published. It became one of Cather's most well-known novels and was later made into a movie. "My Antonia" was published seven years later.
 It wasn't long before Cather's work became recognized nationally.
 In 1923, her book "One of Ours" was awarded the Pulitzer prize, and in 1930, "Death Comes for the Archbishop" was awarded the Howells medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.
 Before Cather died in April 1947, she published five more books, as well as a collection of essays titled "Not Under Forty."
 A majority of her novels focused on life in Nebraska and the people she encountered during her life in the state.
 Although many of her stories are set in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, her writing purveys a timeless beauty still appreciated in today's high-tech world.

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