

English Department Newsletter

Wake Forest University

The Double Life of Lee Norris

By Mary Beth DeVilbiss ('04)

When Lee Norris walks through the Benson Food Court during the lunch rush, everybody knows it. In Norris's four years at Wake Forest there have been no reported incidents of squealing mobs or fainting admirers, but word spreads fast when he walks into a room. Girlfriends gossiping about the latest sorority news quickly change the subject with an excited whisper of, "Ohmygod, that's Lee Norris. No, don't look!"

Norris's campus-wide fame comes neither from athletic prowess nor from legendary fraternity pranks. No, Norris comes by his celebrity the old-fashioned way—he used to be on a couple of TV shows.

Now a tall, thin 21



English major Lee Norris ('04) balances his studies and a role in hit TV series, *One Tree Hill*.

year-old college senior with spiky hair and a big smile, Norris transcends the stereotype of the psychologically damaged former child actor. In fact, were it not for the wake of star-struck whispers he leaves behind, Norris would be just an ordinary

clean-cut Wake Forest student in jeans and a polo shirt. "Ordinary," however, does not accurately describe Norris's background.

"I remember *The Cosby Show*, watching the kids and telling my parents I wanted to be one of those kids," he recalls. At first Norris's parents were reluctant to get him involved in show business, but, "They were good parents and I was an only child, so they gave in eventually." A few projects at the local Greenville, N.C. children's theater soon led to an audition for a play at Eastern Carolina University.

"Actually, I auditioned because I had a crush on one of the girls [in the play]," Norris confesses with a chuckle. Although the romance (see page 5)

A Note from Department Chair Gale Sigal

Greetings. Our newsletter has given us the opportunity to hear from so many of you. It's been wonderful to learn that so many of our alumni/ae are writers, journalists, teachers, and

professors! Some of you have sent me copies of your work, and we are putting them on display in our library/lounge. We are so pleased to be able to show you off! Please continue to

keep us informed. We will try to do likewise through this newsletter.

Wishing you a happy new year,

Professor Sigal

Volume 3, Issue 1
Fall, 2003

Inside this issue:

<i>Honors Gets an Extreme Makeover</i>	2
<i>Medieval Revival</i>	3
<i>Meet the New English Professors of 2003-04</i>	3
<i>WFU English De-grees At Work</i>	4
<i>The Double Life of Lee Norris (cont.)</i>	5
<i>In Between (A Poem)</i>	6

Special points of interest:

- English major Lee Norris ('04) discusses his role on TV's *One Tree Hill*
- Dr. Lisa Sternlieb explains the changes to the honors program
- English Dept. grads check in with updates
- Enjoy an original poem by English major Joy *Feminella* ('04)



Honors Program Gets Extreme Makeover

By Dr. Lisa Sternlieb



New honors director Lisa Sternlieb explains changes in the program

The honors program has undergone significant changes this year. In the past, students were invited to participate in the honors program based on their GPA. They were invited the spring of their junior year. The director of honors (Scott Klein) would ask them to list the courses they had taken in English and the courses they were planning to take their senior year. The honors director would then assign them reading from two classes they had not taken in the English Department. For example, an honors candidate who had never taken Victorian Fiction or Milton would be asked to read *Jane Eyre*, *Middlemarch*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Paradise Lost* over the summer. In September this same honors candidate would be given an oral exam by a Victorianist and a Miltonist. The director or assistant director of the honors program would also be present. The student would be expected to discuss intelligently the reading s/he had done independently over the summer. Once the student had passed the exam, s/he was invited to write an honors thesis.

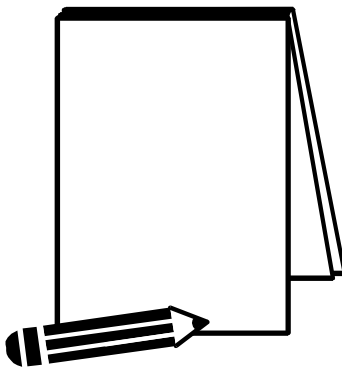
The honors thesis is 30-40 pages long. It is due the first Friday in April. Generally students read as much as they could in the fall semester and then began writing over Christmas or during the spring semester. Students registered for English 388 (4 credits/3 hours) in the spring.

In his last year as director of honors, Scott Klein asked the English Department to substantially change the honors program. So this year is essentially an experiment. Students must now be nominated by faculty members. They must still have a GPA of 3.5 in English and an overall GPA of 3.2. But a faculty member must feel that the student s/he nominates is capable of doing outstanding independent work. For the first time, students are not preparing for an oral exam in the fall. Instead, they spent last summer researching a topic for their thesis. By September 4, all honors candidates were required to have selected a faculty advisor for their honors thesis. By Thursday, October 2, all honors candidates were required to give the director of the honors program and their faculty advisor a substantial bibliography. Students often waited until the spring semester to come up with a thesis topic and to ask a faculty advisor to work with them. Students must start working on their thesis much earlier now. Each month the honors students participate in a workshop with the new director of honors (Lisa Sternlieb).

We hope that this will build a community of honors students. Previously, students often felt isolated from other students working on theses. So far the honors group has met three times this semester. The first time we discussed general concerns. The second time honors students read literary criticism by Professors Jan Caldwell, Evie Shockley, and Lisa Sternlieb. Professors Caldwell and Shockley joined us for this discussion and advised students about how to work with criticism and how to formulate their own ideas in response to criticism. The third time three of the honors candidates presented their own work to the group and got excellent feedback from each other about how to proceed. As the director of honors, I hope that these workshops are helping the students to relax and feel comfortable writing criticism. Students are writing on vastly different topics and using remarkably different approaches. I want them to see that there are many different ways of writing about literature and that no one method is the best. I've been pleased to see that a student writing about Old English poetry is able to help one writing about C.S. Lewis, and that a student interested in philosophical approaches to fiction is able to advise one interested in feminist psychoanalytic criticism.

Many of the students who were nominated to participate in the honors program chose not to. I advise a student to write an honors thesis if s/he has an original idea, a particular interest, or a desire to attend graduate school. I advise a student not to write an honors thesis if s/he is not self-directed or self-motivated. I advise against writing an honors thesis if a student wants to earn prestige. Above all, I make it clear that honors in English is independent work. Choose an advisor you would like to work with, but don't expect your advisor to give you a topic.

A faculty member must feel that the student s/he nominates for honors is capable of doing outstanding independent work.



Medieval Revival

By Mary Kate Hurley ('04)

Medieval Studies is a growing department at Wake Forest, and this year, a group of dedicated upper-classmen is working to make sure that it will remain so in years to come. The Aesir group, formally known as the Wake Forest Student Medieval Society was formed this fall under the guidance of Dr. Sigal and is currently awaiting its charter to become an official Wake Forest student organization. The purpose of the group is two-fold: to further the study of the Middle Ages at Wake Forest, and to study the reception of both the medieval and medievalism in the modern world. We have several ideas for activities and events next se-

mester, including a mini-conference as well as several movie viewings and discussions. Our first viewing, of the classic comedy *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, featured a discussion led by senior Scott Tucker and was a great success. All students are welcome to join the group – there are no requirements for participation, although an interest in the medieval period is encouraged. Any interested students should contact Mary Kate Hurley (hurlmk0@wfu.edu) for further information.

Meet the New English Professors of 2003-04

- **Beth Bradburn's** specialty is in seventeenth-century literature. She has taught at Tufts University as well as Boston College and will be teaching the Writing Seminar and Introduction to British Literature here at Wake Forest.
- **Susan Bussey's** field is American Literature with a concentration in African-American Literature. She will be teaching the Writing Seminar and Introduction to American Literature.
- **Temple Cone's** field is twentieth-century American Literature, and he also has interests in history and creative writing. Mr. Cone will be teaching the Writing Seminar and Introduction to American Literature.
- **Stephanie Hawkins's** fields are late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century American Literature, and American and transatlantic modernism, science and literature, and women's literature. Dr. Hawkins will be teaching Introduction to Critical Reading & Writing and Introduction to American Literature.
- **Paul Hecht's** interests extend to works in Ancient Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and German. He will be teaching the Writing Seminar and Introduction to British Literature.
- **Borislav Knezevic** has taught at Zagreb University, Duke University, and previously, at Wake Forest, and we are delighted to welcome him back to teaching the Writing Seminar and Introduction to British Literature.
- **John Martin** has taught several classes on American Literature, as well as classes on women and religion in literature at the School of Continuing Studies at Northwestern. Mr. Martin will be teaching the Writing Seminar and Introduction to American Literature.
- **Mary Martin Niepold** has been a freelance writer in New York for the last eighteen years. She recently served as the Executive Editor of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. She has also been an editor and writer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Ms. Niepold will be teaching the Writing Seminar, Introduction to Journalism, and Writing for Publication.





WFU English Degrees At Work

Wake grads check in to let us know about life after the English Department.

- **Dr. Bryon Lee Grigsby** left his teaching position last spring for the position of Dean of Graduate and Professional Programs at Centenary College in Hackettstown, NJ. He was also interviewed by the *Washington Post* about this year's SARS outbreak.
- **Laura Raines Yaramishyn (BA '72)** is a freelance writer in Atlanta, GA. She writes regularly for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and other publications. In 2002, she co-authored the book, *Lessons from the Forests*, with Ben Mathes.
- **Marta McCave (BA '77)** is a speechwriter and manager of internal communications for The Vanguard Group, a mutual fund company based in Malvern, PA. In 2002, McCave co-authored a best-selling book on investing with Vanguard Chairman Jack Brennan, entitled *Straight Talk on Investing: What You Need to Know* (Wiley). She would also like to send greetings to Dr. Bill Moss!
- **Laura Elliott Behm (BA '79)** has been a senior writer with the *Washingtonian* magazine for eighteen years. She is the author of two children's books, *Under a War-Torn Sky* (2001) and *Flying South* (2003). She is also the author of the picture book *Hunter's Best Friend at School*, illustrated by Lynn Munsinger.
- **Mary McLean Hix (BA '79, MA '81)** is a Career Counselor at Florida Southern College, where she has also taught Freshman English. She helps students write effective resumes, cover letters and grad school essays. Hix has also worked as a freelance writer and editor of English textbooks.
- **Robert K. Upchurch (MA '94)**, an Assistant Professor at the University of North Texas, has written an article entitled, "'The Goed Fyn' of Saint Alexius in a Middle English Version of His Legend", which is published in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, January 2003.
- **Richard Brantley (BA '66)** is an Alumni/ae Professor of English at the University of Florida and the author of four books. He is hoping to finish another book in the very near future entitled, *Experience and Faith: The Late-Romantic Imagination of Emily Dickinson*.

We would love to hear from you, too!

Let us know about your recent accomplishments and developments by contacting us at

english@wfu.edu

English Department Newsletter

Box 7387

Winston-Salem, NC 27109

We also welcome comments and suggestions for the newsletter.

Don't forget to include your full name and graduation year!

I hear over and over from professionals that they wish they had taken their writing classes more seriously. English majors rock!

-Mary McLean Hix (BA '79, MA '81)



(“The Double Life of Lee Norris” cont. from page 1)

didn’t pan out, the actress put Norris in contact with an agent she knew in nearby Raleigh, N.C.

Soon Norris had several auditions, one of which landed him the role of eight year-old Chuckie Lee Torkleson on the sitcom *The Torklesons*. This first television gig gave him the opportunity to work with such up-and-comers as Brittany Murphy of this summer’s *Uptown Girls*. But the show didn’t survive its second season. “Unfortunately, we were on against this show called *60 Minutes*,” he quips good-naturedly.

But the role for which Norris is most well-known around campus came a couple of years later as prototypical grammar school geek Minkus on the successful ABC sitcom *Boy Meets World*. Fortunately, “[Being cast as a nerd] didn’t bother me because I liked the work,” Norris says of his two year stint on the show. When the show’s characters moved on to high school, Norris himself left L.A. and headed back to North Carolina to focus on his own high school career. During middle school and high school, Norris worked on four or five TV movies, including one starring Goldie Hawn. “Yeah,” he says of that experience with a characteristic grin, “that was cool.”

Despite his fairly consistent work, Norris decided to concentrate on his education rather than on acting in his college years. Although he kept his talent representation in Raleigh and even found an agent in Los Angeles, Norris asked them not to call unless an unbeatable career opportunity arose. This decision left Norris free to lead his ordinary Wake Forest life with little more than the occasional excited whisper to break his routine.

Until last spring.

During spring break, while most other Wake students were drinking beer on far away beaches, Norris auditioned for his latest television role. And he got the part. In the new WB series *One Tree Hill*, which was recently picked up by the network for a full season, Norris plays Mouth McFadden, high school basketball announcer and friend of “the good poor kid” Lucas Scott, played by Chad Michael Murray. According to www.thewb.com, the show tells the story of two brothers raised by different parents on different sides of the tracks who end up on the same basketball team. Romance, drama and humor ensue. “Basically,” Norris sums up, “this series is *Dawson’s Creek* plus basketball,” referring to the popular WB teen drama that ended last season.

Before landing the role, Norris considered applying to law school after graduation. But Norris’s new role may have steered him down a different life path. Rather than pursuing entertainment law right away, Norris is now seriously considering focusing on his acting career for at least a year, “Just to see what happens.” This uncertainty is new for Norris, who says, “It’s been a good life lesson. I’m used to doing things by a plan, and this is the first time I’ve really been thrown off—not knowing what to do right after college.”

Whatever path he chooses, the confident and articulate Norris promises to find success through hard work and plenty of talent. In the meantime, Norris is content to hang out with his costars on the weekends, including former MTV veejay, Hilarie Burton, and “One of my favorite actresses,” Moira Kelly, most recently of NBC’s *The West Wing*. “It’s kind of surreal,” muses Norris, “[Burton] is telling me all these stories about Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake—all these people she hangs out with—and here I am hanging out with her.”

If Wake’s whispering fans are any indication of what’s to come, Norris may be the one hanging out with Hollywood royalty and pop icons before long. For now, he’s just trying to keep up with his school work.

*I’m used to
doing things
by a plan,
and this is the
first time I’ve
really been
thrown off—
not knowing
what to do
right after
college.*



Pro Humanitate

Wake Forest University

English Department
P.O. Box 7365
Reynolda Station
Winston-Salem, NC 27109



*The WFU English Department
wishes you a happy new year.*

In Between

By Joy Feminella ('04)

A cricket wriggles to sound,
And I am there,
Barefoot and whole.
I walk down the worn railroad
ties.
Rope burns my hands but I
clench
Because I know.

I hear water and something
Alive greater than me,
But I don't have to leap
To prove myself;
Instead I look, I wait
A moment.

I can hear distance.
Hiding from the other end,
I skulk on splintered wood.
I skip a flat stone across my
home.
Dignity is missing here, but
The naked have no awareness.

Do they have professors to
teach humility?
Lapping recedes into the dis-
tance, and
A squirrel with a black walnut
bigger than its head
Requests my attention for
A lesson in productivity.

The sun and my head briefly
eclipse,
Alone, but there in the ever-
presence.
I am not empty, I am not full
I am somewhere between
pride and the river.

