

Inaugural Ann Head Literary Prize for Short Story Fiction Honors Pat Conroy's Mentor



To Pat Conroy, she was always his “first novelist.” Beaufort-born novelist and short fiction writer Ann Head (1915-1968) was recruited to be Beaufort High School's first creative writing teacher during Pat Conroy's senior year (1962-63). A remarkable storyteller and an unconventional mentor, she became teacher and friend to young Pat as he was just beginning the arc of his storied writing life.

The family of Ann Head is pleased to announce the winner and finalists of the inaugural Ann Head Literary Prize for Short Story Fiction. The winning story was chosen from more than 40 entries written by students at Beaufort High School.

The high caliber of the stories made the decision of the seven judges, all Ann Head family members, both difficult and enjoyable. The family is grateful for the enthusiastic support of the Beaufort High School English Department and its chair, Wendy LaCombe, as well as for the

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Written by Margaret Evans
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support and partnership in this endeavor of Jonathan Haupt, executive director of the nonprofit Pat Conroy Literary Center.

“Something Is Here” by BHS senior Claire Bowden is the winner of the Ann Head Prize by unanimous vote of the judges. A well-researched historical fiction of a French Jewish family caught up in the Holocaust, the story brings to life the horrors of the its historical setting while also giving empowering glimpses of hope. The tone of the story avoids being heavy-handed and demonstrates remarkable skill on the part of the writer. The secondary theme of fostering one’s humanness builds as the story unfolds. The challenge for short fiction is to create a whole story with a beginning, middle, and end, with concision and grace. Claire achieves this brilliantly.

Claire will receive a cash prize of \$500, sponsored by the family of Ann Head. Her name will be engraved on a literary plaque to be permanently displayed at Beaufort High School, and she will be honored at the 5th annual Pat Conroy Literary Festival this fall where she will have the opportunity to read her story.

“A Fair and Impartial Jury” by sophomore Emmett O’Brien and “Coffee for a Dollar” by sophomore Holland Perryman were recognized as finalists by the judges. Congratulations to Holland and Emmett for their excellent writing and creativity. And congratulations as well to all of the other students who submitted stories for consideration. They are all promising young writers—and there is certain to be a future Pat Conroy among them.

About Ann Head

Writer Ann Head, the pen name of Anne Wales Christensen Head Morse (1915–1968), was the granddaughter of Abbie Holmes Christensen, who came to Beaufort during the Civil War to educate the recently freed enslaved populations of the Sea Islands. Moving back and forth between Boston and Beaufort, Ann carried on the family tradition of bucking traditions and creating new literary forms. She was a central figure in Beaufort’s midcentury literary scene, befriending many of the famous authors who wintered here, including Samuel Hopkins Adams (whom she considered her mentor), Somerset Maugham, John Marquand, and Katherine and E. B. White.

First married to the inventor Howard Head, Ann published dozens of short stories and serials in

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the major national magazines of her day, with many of her stories set in a small town just like Beaufort. She wrote of divorce, snobbery, affairs both emotional and sexual, prejudice, death, and out-of-wedlock childbirth, championing the non-typical heroines of the magazines that eagerly accepted her work. In addition, she authored four novels which were published internationally, most notably *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*, a compelling story of teen pregnancy which was later adapted for film starring Desi Arnez Jr., was on school reading lists for 50 years, and is credited with helping create the Young Adult literary genre.

In conservative mid-twentieth century Beaufort, Ann championed civil rights and other liberal causes, and was a doyenne of local society, celebrated for her sophistication and literary achievement. She managed to successfully raise an out-of-wedlock child, eventually marrying the child's father, all the while staying respected and revered in small-town society. Ann died suddenly in 1968 at the age of 52, cutting short a vibrant life and promising literary career.

The life of Ann Head was chronicled by her daughter, Nancy Thode, in a public lecture the main branch of the Beaufort County Library. This video can be seen on the YouTube channels of the Pat Conroy Literary Center and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at USCB. To learn more about Ann Head, see her entry in Wikipedia. Her stories and books are also available at the Beaufort County Library. END OF FIRST SECTION

Excerpt from “Something Is Here” by Claire Bowden (Ann Head Literary Prize winner)

“You may sit until it is your turn to get a number. Your number is your identification. Memorize it in German. If

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