

GCSU professor named Georgia Author of the Year

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'Momma May Be Mad' by Georgia Author of the Year honoree and GCSU associate professor of English, Dr. Kerry Neville.

For the second year in a row, a Georgia College & State University faculty member has been named a Georgia Author of the Year.

Dr. Kerry Neville, interim chair of the Department of Communication and associate professor of English, earned Author of the Year acclaim for her memoir "Momma May Be Mad." Published in October 2025, Neville's work takes readers on a nonlinear journey through various trials she faced in life, including diagnoses of bipolar disorder, anorexia, alcoholism and being labeled a "hopeless case" by her psychiatrist.

"Part of why I wrote the book was for people to understand we have the power of self-definition," Neville said. "Yes, clinical diagnoses are helpful, but they are not our totality. The book is about finding joy and figuring out how to rebuild a life after walking through a dark tunnel. I hope to give hope."

The word memoir has roots in Latin and French terms for memory and reminiscence. While sometimes breaking the fourth wall between author and audience, Neville takes readers through the self-described "loop-de-loop" that is her memory of the difficult times she experienced and how she came out the other side.

Writing for "Momma May Be Mad" began five years before publication, with the first draft followed by a fine-tooth-comb revision process. People paid attention before the Author of the Year award came through. Neville was featured on Georgia Public Broadcasting and National Public Radio programs "Georgia Today" and "All Things Considered" in May. Kirkus Reviews called the book, "An unusually intriguing and poignant memoir."

Further payoff came when Neville received an email from the Georgia Writers Association announcing her as Author of the Year in the memoir category.

"I was thrilled," said Neville. "I worked so hard on this book, not just in terms of length of time it took to write, and not just because of the content, but because I think of myself as a meticulous writer. I couldn't rest with the book until I knew I had gotten as close as possible to my idea of the vision for the content and the artistic ambition I had."

Mission accomplished. Georgia Author of the Year judge Mimi Zieman said in her comments, "There is much to admire about the stunning writing in Kerry Neville's memoir ... [It] is both a literary wonder and an invitation of hope to those impacted by mental illness and the people who love them."

Neville's 2026 Georgia Author of the Year award put her in company with GCSU Department of English colleague Laura Newbern. Her book "A Night in the Country" won last year in the full-length poetry category.

"One of the things I love about teaching at a liberal arts university is the support of what we do in the world with our creative ambitions," Neville said.

Words – and voices – matter

A Long Island, New York, native and former Fulbright Scholar to Ireland, Neville has been a Georgia College faculty member for 10 years. Prior to "Momma May Be Mad," she published two collections of short stories, "Necessary Lies" and "Remember to Forget Me."

When it comes to teaching students to write, Neville knows what to look for.

"I look for possibility. I look for how I can help this student achieve what they're trying to achieve on the page through their imagination or their ambitions."

Neville encourages students to submit their pieces for publication, and to remember one important fact even when they are met with rejection.

"Rejection is not a measurement of worth as a writer," she said. "Their voices matter. AI cannot approximate inherent, innate, individual creativity. That's what I hope my students learn to value. Not writing the perfect sentence, but writing a sentence that offers something of themselves, their perspective on the world."