

Masterful Words

Writer Roz Unruh is Delaware's 2007 Masters Fellow in Literature

Roz Unruh doesn't consider herself to be a verbal person; she admits she feels more comfortable writing than talking.

"In conversation, you sometimes say the wrong thing," she explains. "I like the fact that [in writing] you can go back and make changes [until] it's exactly what you want to say."

The soft-spoken Unruh has a lot to say. A lifelong diarist, she wrote her first 200-page novel at the age of 10. She has written articles for Wilmington's *Out and About* magazine and for four years served as fiction editor of *The Washington Review*.

More recently, she has taken giant steps to advance her career as a novelist, garnering accolades for her work, along with the prospect of a major publishing contract.

Of the three manuscripts she has completed as an adult writer, the first, a "coming-of-age" novel, was a finalist for the Bakeless Literary Publication Prize at the annual Bread Loaf Writers' Conference at Middlebury College and the national Bellwether Prize for a first novel and was first runner-up for the William Faulkner Creative Writing Competition. Her second novel was a finalist in the Faulkner competition. And her latest, *Various States of Undress*, about a feminist stripper, won the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Award for feminist writing and was also a Faulkner competition finalist. The manuscript is now in the hands of an editor at Random House.

In her home state, Unruh's talent has not gone unrecognized. In 1996, she received a Delaware Individual Artist Fellowship as an emerging professional in fiction, and again in 1999, as an established professional in the same discipline.

Various States of Undress is told from the point of view of an introspective female narrator, the kind of character the author likes to write about but that "you might not normally sympathize with." Unruh spent part of her early life in Germany and speaks German. She describes her writing as "truncated German style." "I write in short, choppy sentences. It's my natural style," she explains. "Then I go back and sometimes combine two sentences and try to make it more flowing."

An avid reader, she says, "I like contemporary fiction much better than some of the classics. Contemporary writing seems crisp and clean." Overly wordy writing strikes her as "self-indulgent." "You want to read something without a lot of excess verbiage," she says.

Unruh reads about 25 books a year. If a book is short, she may outline the plot to dissect its structure. While studying painting and sculpture, she also took some creative writing courses at NYU, but wishes she had

Continued on page 4



Roz Unruh relaxes in her painted chair *Longhorn's Lair* in the children's section of the Wilmington Library, where the artwork is on permanent display. Photo credit: Amy Tucker