

## Biography for Heather Bryant Jordan

### **Jordan, Heather Bryant**

**Born:** October 12, 1959, in Boston, Massachusetts

**Vocations:** Author, Editor, Professor, Poet

**Geographic Connection to Pennsylvania:** State College, Centre County

**Keywords:** *Through Your Hands*; *Cheap Grace*; *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War*; *Lottery Ticket*; Rising Star designation; The Pennsylvania State University

**Abstract:** Born in October 1959, Heather Bryant Jordan was raised in a family that valued literacy and reading. Jordan, an English professor and accomplished writer, attended Harvard University and the University of Michigan, earning her bachelor's and Ph.D degrees. Her recently published works include *Cheap Grace*, a poetry collection, and *Through Your Hands*, a novel that won the Rising Star and Editor's Choice awards. Jordan currently teaches English composition and creative writing at The Pennsylvania State University and is working on her next novel.

### **Biography:**

On October 12, 1959, Heather Bryant Jordan was born to Douglas Wallace Bryant and Rene Kuhn Bryant in Boston, Massachusetts. Jordan, a third generation college woman, comes from a line of scholarly and literary thinkers. Her mother studied with Arthur Miller at the University of Michigan and wrote two novels, training young Jordan to be observant and "to make stories out of what [she] saw going on in the world around [her]." Additionally, Jordan's father was the Director and librarian of Harvard Libraries, instilling in her an inclination to ask questions and be curious as well as teaching her to revere books. As a child, Jordan had the opportunity to touch a copy of the Guttenberg Bible and dig the first shovel of dirt during the groundbreaking for Harvard's design library.

Jordan majored in History and Literature at Harvard University, graduating cum laude in 1981. Her honors thesis, "Sight and Sensibility: A Study of Ruskin, Turner, and Praeterita," won the John Ruskin Prize. She worked on the university's literary magazine, *The Harvard Advocate*, during her college years. The week of her graduation, Jordan wrote a poem called "The Garden Party" that the *Christian Science Monitor* published and awarded her a prize for.

After graduation, Jordan taught English for a year at Phillips Academy Andover, a preparatory school. This was followed by an additional English teaching stint at Middlesex, where she also served as Associate Director of Admissions for two years. She then pursued her master's and doctorate degrees in Modern British and Irish Literature at the University of Michigan,

earning many accolades during her time there. Jordan won an outstanding teacher award, in addition to earning a Rackham dissertation award and a Rackham fellowship. The fellowships enabled her to conduct research for her dissertation in England, Ireland, and New York City. Jordan's dissertation and first academic book, *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War*, won the Donald R. Murphy Prize for Best First Prize at the American Conference on Irish Studies and was published by the University of Michigan Press in 1992. She also worked on the Cornell Yeats Series, specifically *The Island of Statues*.

Jordan moved from Ann Arbor to Boston to teach writing at Harvard University, where she continued to be recognized for her outstanding teaching. Jordan taught freshman English at the college from 1990 to 1993. Her twin children, Douglas and Phoebe, were born in 1994, and her son Walker was born in 1996. In 1995, Jordan returned from her leave and taught English to adults at Harvard's Extension School until 2005. While teaching at Harvard's Extension School, she also worked at Wellesley College as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Writing Program from 2003 to 2005. Jordan and her family then moved to State College, Pennsylvania, and she began teaching at The Pennsylvania State University, where she continues to earn recognition for her excellent teaching.

Throughout decades of helping writers grow and find their own voices as an English professor, Jordan also continued to pursue her other passion: creative writing. On why she writes, Jordan reflects, "I think I write because I can't not write. I write because it's how I think, how I see the world, how I remember things, how I figure out what I think, what I want to leave behind." Jordan also reflects on how she enjoys writing in a variety of genres, since each serves a different purpose: "poems to help me sharpen my insight and sense of language play, novels to tell stories, and creative nonfiction to give a shape to the story that is my life continuing to develop over time."

In 2011, Jordan's first published novel, *Through Your Hands*, won the Rising Star and Editor's Choice awards. The novel centers on Joy and Gregg, a couple whose first child, Bean, is still born, and delves into how they struggle to heal after the tragedy. The poignantly written book explores the challenges of teen pregnancy and the miracles of adoption. Jordan's first chapbook, *Cheap Grace*, was also published in 2011. Her second poetry collection, *Lottery Ticket*, is forthcoming in Fall 2013.

Jordan is currently working on her next work of fiction, a novel entitled *Praying for Divorce*, which explores the end of a marriage. All of her writing grapples with how writing, mothering, and teaching consistently overlap. These are themes present in many of Jordan's works, in which she explores, "what lies beneath the surface but does not get expressed, the freedom and exhilarating feeling of being a modern woman, but the costs that accompany that—being a writer and a mother and a teacher all at the same time." Jordan believes that, to some degree, fiction is a translation of what we see, feel, and know.

Her works being circulated include *Calypso: My Wedding Dress*, a poetry collection, as well as a creative nonfiction book, *You Can't Wrap Fire in Paper*.

Heather Bryant Jordan currently lives with her three children in State College, Pennsylvania. She continues to teach English composition and creative writing at The Pennsylvania State University.

### **Works:**

#### Novel

- *Through Your Hands*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Inc., 2011.

#### Poetry Chapbooks

- *Cheap Grace*. Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press, 2011.
- *Lottery Ticket*. Madison, WI: Parallel Press Series of the University of Wisconsin, 2013.

#### Academic Book

- *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

### **Sources:**

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- "Heather Bryant Jordan." Amazon. 6 Feb. 2012. <[http://www.amazon.com/Heather-Bryant-Jordan/e/B001HPOPJY/ref=ntt\\_dp\\_epwbk\\_0](http://www.amazon.com/Heather-Bryant-Jordan/e/B001HPOPJY/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0)>.

This biography was prepared by Grace Schmidt, Spring 2012.