

Jenny Kiefer, B.A. English Creative Writing, 2011

By Joseph Shoulders

Butcher Cabin Books Owner & Horror Novelist

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[Jenny Kiefer](#) graduated from WKU in 2011, where she concentrated in Creative Writing and minored in German. Kiefer’s debut novel [This Wretched Valley](#) is set to release in 2024. Kiefer and her mother run [Butcher Cabin Books](#), a horror genre bookstore, opening in Louisville, KY on October 15, 2022.



Kiefer originally attended WKU for their praised photojournalism program, but within her first semester, she was swayed by her literature courses to switch her major to English. She noted how interesting the discussions in Gothic Literature with Dr. Sandra Hughes and the Honors English Forum with Professor Walker Rutledge were.

Since early grade school, Kiefer has been writing stories, and she was the president of her high school’s creative writing club. She studied her craft passionately at WKU, which was one of the first universities to offer a Creative Writing major. “I took a very wide variety of creative writing classes while I was there. I think the only one I didn’t take was poetry,” Kiefer said. After taking several fiction workshops and writing her thesis under Dr. David Bell, Kiefer has maintained a lasting relationship with him, and she still reaches out to him for advice on writing and querying.

After Kiefer graduated from WKU, she worked in different positions, such as a telemarketer for *The Courier-Journal* and an administrative assistant for Dismas Charities. After four years, she realized that she missed the school environment that fosters creative writing, and she attended the University of Louisville for her M.A. in English. Kiefer interned at *Louisville Magazine* for course credit, and she enjoyed the experience and became a contributing writer. She has won four Society of Professional Journalism Awards.

After graduating from UofL, Kiefer returned to her life-long goal to publish a novel. The premise of *This Wretched Valley* stemmed from Kiefer's experiences rock climbing and wanting to describe them in fiction. She had also been reading about the Dyatlov Pass Incident, and she was intrigued by the many theories on what transpired. Her novel took inspiration from both interests, and Kiefer aimed to have her characters "find these bodies in really bizarre ways and then have them backtrack to figure out how the bodies ended up that way."

While she was drafting her novel, Kiefer recalled a lesson she learned in her Introduction to Creative Writing course. Their main assignment was to write 500 words a day for 5 days a week, and by the end of the project, she had around 30,000 words for one story. "Even though I never worked on the project after that, the assignment helped me see that writing that small amount steadily will build up, and you'll end up finishing a book in not that much time," Kiefer said. "So, when I started drafting books, that was something in the back of my head as I considered a manageable daily word count."

After Kiefer completed her manuscript, she submitted it to the 2021 [Pitch Wars](#), which was the final running of this mentoring program. The horror author Cynthia Pelayo chose to mentor Kiefer, and they worked on character emotions and points of view. Then, the two worked together on a showcase where agents could comment to request to read the manuscript. This process is how Kiefer secured an agent and book deal for her novel.

Kiefer has since finished the developmental edits and is working on some smaller edits before the copyediting phase. In the meantime, Kiefer has been writing short stories and drafting an outline for her next novel. Additionally, she has surrounded herself with other horror novels by [establishing Butcher Cabin Books](#), a space that she envisions as a community for readers and writers.

One piece of advice Kiefer has for current students is to not hesitate to reach out to people for help. "I found that most people want to help you, and if they don't know the answer, they can refer you to someone who does," she said. Drawing on her own experiences, Kiefer also recommends "apply[ing] to opportunities or study[ing] topics that interest you even if they are new or not what you're going to school for because you never know where those experiences will lead you."