JULIE THARP, PhD
by Jane Kennedy

Dr. Julie Tharp has been an active member of the Marshfield community since arriving here in 1992. She chaired the Marshfield Cultural Fair from 2007 to 2022, doubling the attendance, moving from one to two performing stages, increasing the number and variety of exhibitors, and guiding a dauntless core committee and hundreds of volunteers.

Dr. Tharp has chaired the Sheltering Hearts annual fundraiser for Personal Development Center / Orenda Center (PDC) since 2006. She contributed annually to the campus fundraiser Food for Thought, including organizing the many wonderful chefs. Her Dinner and a Movie class has been running since the 1990's. She has offered over 150 film and food experiences for the community. She has served on the PDC/Orenda Center board of directors since the 1990's and sat on the Marshfield News-Herald editorial board, the Pathway Partners board, the Women's Giving Circle, and Healthy Lifestyles board. She has worked over the years to help the Marshfield Public Library create city-wide reading programs and book discussions as well as provided researched presentations at the library on topics ranging from Native American literature to international film.

Julie is particularly known for her advocacy for women. Given that her career path eventually led her to a Ph.D. in English, Julie was first attracted to women's literature. Dr. Tharp's interest was in learning how structural injustice affected all women, not just middle class, straight, white women like herself. From there she went on to study international writing, focusing more particularly on Southeast Asian women writers. Her published research is almost exclusively focused on women's literature. During graduate school, she also took classes at the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Feminist Study.

Early on, Julie became most compelled by gender violence. As a survivor herself and surrounded by other female survivors, she concluded at some point that women's safety and sense of security were fundamental to their ability to survive, to develop and to succeed in life. She became interested in how women negotiated, survived, and thrived despite their experiences with abuse, but also realized that she wanted to address gender violence in any way that she could—assisting victims, shifting mindsets, and helping to transform the culture at large.

Once she finished her schooling, Dr. Tharp moved to Wisconsin to take up a position as English professor at University of Wisconsin- Marshfield. There she had the chance to be involved in new efforts. Almost immediately, she became involved in grass roots community efforts. Julie's attitude was, "Whatever I applied myself to, I always used principles learned in grad school about empowering those around me and leaving space for people to come forward." She also tried to incorporate power analysis in classes, offering, for instance, a course on Race, Class and Gender in Film, rather than simply Introduction to Film. She also looked for ways to highlight women's history and experiences. For example, when the campus had a 60s theme, she organized a fashion show/ champagne brunch for the community with a narrated history of women's fashions.



Julie Tharp

In Dr Tharp's classes she asked her composition students each to write an essay about sexual assault on college campuses, an academic exercise, without self-revelations. However, once they began, the students discovered that 50% of the women in the class had been raped at some point. One outcome of that class was her creation of a Support Group for Survivors of Sexual Assault on the campus. This group ran weekly for years. They never had a shortage of participants. Julie also taught Women's Literature and Introduction to Women's Studies and took pleasure in helping students to discover new authors and new world views. Eventually she was able to create service-learning opportunities for students, connecting them to area groups, businesses, and agencies where they could volunteer or intern to apply their education in the real world. They also created public exhibits, like a

women's history quilt to hang in the library, and activist events, like a community panel on sexual assault.

Over the years, Julie has given many talks and workshops with community folks around the topics of sexual harassment and gender violence. She has also given many conference presentations on this, the most recent of which were her efforts on behalf of the North American crisis of MMIWG—Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Julie's second Fulbright was in Mumbai, India, in 2016 and focused on the role of Bollywood film in addressing gender violence there. Sharing that research and working with a variety of Indian women and filmmakers (and Indian women filmmakers) really expanded her understanding of this issue on a global scale. She has worked to bring that understanding back to Marshfield and to the wider community of Gender Studies scholars.

Around the time that Julie Tharp's first book, Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women's Writing, was published, the local Domestic Violence non-profit agency reached out to her. Personal Development Center's board was looking for new members. She interviewed with the current board, was selected as a new member, and never looked back. She has now been on that board for around 25 years with a few breaks while she was teaching overseas in Singapore, Scotland, and India. With immense amounts of hard work and personal sacrifice on the parts of many people, the agency still exists, has expanded to six different programs, now owns its own building, operates a large shelter, and has positively impacted the lives of thousands of women and children over the years. If Julie Tharp had to say what she is most satisfied with in her life, it is with her continuing commitment to this agency, the board and staff, and the many participants who have entered with the hope of creating a better life for themselves and their families.

One motto that has always stayed with Julie is to "think globally and act locally." She has done her best to apply that approach to her career, her community service efforts, and her personal life.