

Contact: Rachel Boon

**REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DOCTORAL DEGREES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa to award an honorary Doctor of Literature degree to Nancy Price and an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Mabel Jane Jennison Elliott (known as Jane Elliott) at Spring 2018 Commencement.

Executive Summary: Ms. Price and Ms. Elliott have each led distinguished careers in their respective fields. The University of Northern Iowa (UNI) wishes to honor them for their achievements and contributions through the awarding of honorary doctorates.

Details on Ms. Price's Accomplishments: Nancy Price has a unique, storied connection to the UNI and Cedar Falls. She has published 10 novels and a collection of poems, with many of her stories set in Cedar Falls and on the campus of UNI.

Nancy's third and best-known novel, *Sleeping with the Enemy*, was on national and international best-seller lists and has been translated into more than 20 languages. The film of the novel, which starred Julia Roberts, opened as the number one film in the nation at its February 1991 premiere and became the fourth-highest grossing film of that year. In 2001, a decade after its release, the film ranked as the second most popular movie based on a novel written by a woman. Price has been ahead of her time in her fiction. In 1987, the term "domestic abuse" had not yet entered the national conversation and the phrase "sleeping with the enemy" had not entered our lexicon.

Nancy was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1925 and moved to Detroit, Michigan as a child. She was an author from a young age and at 14 won a national *Scholastic Magazine* award for writing. In 1940, she moved to Cedar Falls when her father, Dr. Malcolm Price, became the fourth president of Iowa State Teachers College. She attended the Campus School, housed at the time in Sabin Hall, later named Malcolm Price Laboratory School.

She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and art from Cornell College in 1946, then moved to Boston with her husband, Howard Thompson, where he studied at Harvard University. They returned to Cedar Falls in 1955 when Howard joined the Department of History at Iowa State Teachers College. Nancy began to publish poetry in *The Atlantic*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Saturday Review*, and the *New York Times*. She earned her Master of Arts in English from Iowa State Teachers College in 1964 and studied at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop.

Nancy taught at UNI until 1968 when she left to pursue writing full time. By the early 1970s, Nancy turned her focus to fiction. Her first novel, *A Natural Death* (1973), set in pre-Civil War South Carolina, turned a critical eye on the institution of slavery and slave owners. Her second novel, *An Accomplished Woman* (1979), explored how women are shaped through the story of two very different men who love young Catherine Buckingham. Nancy joined the UNI Department of English Language and Literature in 1980 as a tenured Professor and taught creative writing.

Throughout her literary career, Nancy received countless awards and accolades including The Poetry Society of America Award, the Karolyi Foundation Writer in Residence, the Rockefeller Foundation Resident Scholar, and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre Resident Scholar. In 2017 and 2018, Nancy Price is one of the five nationally-known authors from Cedar Falls celebrated in the year-long Cedar Falls Authors Festival.

At 92, Nancy Price is still writing and illustrating novels. *Three at the Door*, her novel in progress, will be published in 2018 and is set in and around Seerley Park in Cedar Falls. Nancy gives back generously including support of the Oster Regent Theatre and the Hearst Center for the Arts.

Details on Ms. Elliott's Accomplishments:

Jane Elliott is a retired teacher and internationally known advocate for diversity education. Elliott first entered the national scene with her "blue eyes/brown eyes" classroom exercise, which she developed in 1968 to teach her third grade students in Northeast Iowa about the harsh concepts of prejudice and discrimination they were exposed to in the national media.

Jane Elliott was born in 1933 in Riceville, Iowa, and graduated from UNI with a teaching certificate in 1954 and degree in Elementary Education in 1974. During that time, Elliott returned to her hometown of Riceville and started teaching third grade. Elliott developed her "blue eyes/brown eyes" exercise in 1968 when, after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., she realized that simply having a discussion about racism with her classroom full of all-white students would not effectively teach them about the cultural impact and legacy of racism.

In her now famous exercise, Elliott divided her students by eye color, and declared that people with one color were better than ones with the other. The students in the lower position that day were given easily visible armbands to wear. She then modeled to the other students the missteps of the marked students, attributing every real, perceived, and imagined mistake to the color of their eyes. Students picked up on the modeling, creating slurs attached to eye color, and suggesting to their teacher how punishments could be developed to keep the "other eye color in line." After about a day of this division, she reversed who wore the armbands, only to see both sets of students demonstrate cruelty and prejudice toward their fellow classmates when given the opportunity.

When asked about why Elliott developed this groundbreaking exercise, she stated, "Why eye color? Eye color and skin color are caused by the same chemical: melanin," Elliott explains. "There's no logic in judging people by the amount of a chemical in their skin. Pigmentation should have nothing to do with how you treat another person, but unfortunately, it does."

The media heavily publicized Elliott's classroom exercise in the late 1960s and beyond. She appeared on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* in 1968 shortly after the *Riceville Recorder* first publicized her story, and in 1970 she ran her eye-color exercise to adult educators in the White House. The eye color classroom exercise made national news in 1970, when ABC aired its documentary, "The Eye of the Storm." 15 years later, PBS aired "A Class Divided," which included a reunion with the students featured in the earlier documentary, and which won her an honorary Hillman Prize for her pursuit of social justice "in service of the common good." Elliott has appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* five times, most memorably is in 1992, amidst the national racial tension following the Rodney King case, when the exercise was demonstrated with guests in the television audience.

This difficult but important work has been greeted with both praise and criticism. Following the national appearances, many of Elliott's educational colleagues and community members were upset about the attention. Despite the mixed views, she continued with the experiment each year until she retired from teaching in 1985 to devote her full attention to promoting diversity awareness. She brought her work to teachers, police officers, social workers and others across the U.S. and the world. She has also conducted exercises for Fortune 500 companies, the U.S. military, and several federal government agencies. Nine videos have been made of her work, and she has received numerous awards including The Peabody Award, two Emmy Awards, the National Mental Health Association Award for Excellence in Education, the 1996 Findling Award (German), and the 1996 International Documentary Film Award (Amsterdam).