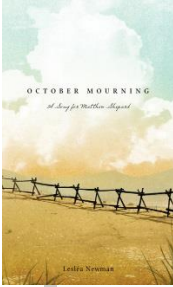




Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



***October Mourning – A Song For Matthew Shepard*, Leslea Newman Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, March 27th, 2013.**

Almost 15 years ago, one cold October night, a young gay man was promised a ride home from a bar by two individuals who pretended to be gay. They kidnapped Matthew Shepherd, beat him unconscious, stole his shoes and twenty dollars and then tied him to a fence in a remote location, with a length of rope, the kind you would hang clothes on to dry, and left him to die. Matthew was discovered 12 hours later by a jogger, who thought he was looking at a scare crow instead of a human being. Matthew was rushed to the hospital, but sadly never regained consciousness and died there five days later. The murder of this young man heightened awareness among people around the world to the intolerance and hatred faced by gays and lesbians, young and old, on a daily basis. The subsequent investigation and trial of the two murderers, who received two life terms in prison for the crime, led to the passing of the Matthew Shepherd and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in the United States, which was signed by President Obama in October 2009. Prior to the passing of this legislation, criminal acts based on an individual's sexual orientation or disabilities, were not prosecuted as hate crimes. (Wikipedia)

Five days after Matthew Shepherd dies, a writer and activist named Leslea Newman, presented a keynote speech for Gay Awareness Week at the University of Wyoming, where Matthew was a student. It was an emotionally charged speech and from that day on, the activist travelled everywhere with a photo of Matthew tucked in her wallet and his memory in her heart. Many articles, books, and films have been made about this senseless murder, but none more captivating and moving than the book I will recommend today. Leslea Newman has written a series of over fifty poems narrating the events of that night and the subsequent trial, telling the story through a variety of perspectives ranging from the fence to which Matthew was tied to the deer who was found keeping vigil by his side, as he languished through the early morning hours. Her poems include the imagined thoughts of the murderers and even their girlfriends who hid the evidence, Matthew's bloody shoes, to protect the offenders. The poems span a variety of forms and include haikus, concrete poems and native prayers and all of them are deeply touching and work together to create a beautiful elegy honoring the life of a gentle soul.