

*For University of Oregon's MFA*

When I graduated from Grand Valley State University's undergraduate program in Creative Writing last year, I had plans of immediately attending graduate school and pursuing my MFA. I felt confident in my skills, having published my first short story in *The Mid-American Review* and served as Editor of my school's literary magazine for three years. However, despite being offered admission to the Art Institute of Chicago and San Francisco State University, I decided to take a year off and apply for admission at different schools for the fall of 2006—a decision I am very happy with.

At the time, I was primarily taking the year off to save some money and figure out my financial situation with graduate schools before I committed to a program. In retrospect, however, I was able to take the time away from the pressures of my senior year of undergraduate study to fully research the programs to which I was applying. For several reasons, this led me to the University of Oregon. I first discovered the program after reading and falling in love with *A Gesture Life* by Chang-rae Lee. When I looked into where he studied, I was excited to also see that the program had an increasing emphasis on postcolonial literature and literature of diaspora. While the schools I applied to for 2005 all paid some attention to global and postmodern literatures, it has become one of my priorities to find a school that balances these contemporary concerns with a tradition of narrative writing. My own writing is primarily set in Mid-Western America, but I've learned the most over the past few years by reading writers like Chang-rae Lee, Ha Jin, Zadie Smith, Jamaica Kincaid, and Shimmer Chinodya. I hope to continue this immersion into different styles and structures of English literature as a way to challenge and expand my own writing.

Additionally, I was glad to see that the program focuses on workshop writing. I was fortunate enough to do my undergraduate work at a school with several gifted professors (Alison Stine, Ander Monson, and Chris Haven). Because of this, and because of the other talented students in the program, I always gained the most from my small group workshops. I found the sense of community encouraged me to write more than I ever had before and to push myself in new directions. I hope to continue that experience with a graduate program that values the workshop as a source of accomplishment (supplemented, of course, with also important seminars).

Finally, the social and natural environment of Oregon are very attractive to me. I'd like to make my home, even if only temporarily, in a community that values social progress and natural beauty. I feel I would be most productive somewhere that nurtures these ideals and attracts those with similar values.

I have tried to use my year off to further develop my skills and to find a place in the writing community of West Michigan. I was invited into a small poetry group with a few of my professors, which has given me the valuable experience of writing in my "off-genre." I also took a position as Assistant Poetry Editor of *DIAGRAM* literary magazine, where I give an initial read to all the poetry submitted and help decide which pieces are considered for publication. Both of these experiences have rekindled my enjoyment of poetry while also reaffirming that fiction and creative nonfiction are my preferred genres. Connected to *DIAGRAM*, I have helped with layout for the magazine's second print anthology and read submissions for the New Michigan Press chapbook contest.

Closer to narrative writing, I was fortunate enough to spend some time in the summer of 2005 teacher assisting for Michael Steinberg at a Grand Valley Writer's Conference. This not only kept me active in a prose workshop, but also exposed me to Steinberg's very helpful ideas on structure and nonfiction plot. I also took a part-time job writing for a Michigan-based gay and lesbian newspaper, *Between the Lines*, covering local events. I rounded this off by taking an independent study with a former professor, Ander Monson, to work one-on-one with the short stories I was writing in my free time.

I feel I could bring quite a bit to the program at the University of Oregon. I'm interested in writing that combines elements of traditional narrative and literary fiction with more progressive and structurally experimental stories. I've exposed myself to many different types of writers working in different forms—from John D'Agata to George Saunders to Chinua Achebe—while also maintaining my own sense of style. I hope that, after studying with the writers at the University of Oregon, I can continue to write and publish while teaching in a similar environment. I've worked for two years as Writing Consultant at Grand Valley and, while this experience is in many fundamental ways different than the experience of teaching a literature or creative course, I do feel it has given me helpful experience and made me confident that I would enjoy working as a professor. With the additional possibility of a Graduate Teaching Fellowship, I believe the program would offer me the ideal environment to pursue these goals.