

My high school students would be bewildered, I imagine, if they knew that their teacher writes for fun. That she actually wants to go back to school solely for the purpose of writing. At an alternative high school in Caledonia, Michigan, I teach art to “at-risk” students. In the evenings I teach English to students from the “regular” high school who failed English in the past and need the credit in order to graduate. My alternative kids are challenging: vulnerable, difficult at times, often angry. Still, I love them—and on most days I go home liking them, too. On the other hand, the English group is easier to manage: the biggest behavior issues to be dealt with are keeping their eyes open and the chatter down. What unites these two groups of students, though, is their hatred of writing. The complaining, the excuses, the whining—it’s truly amazing. Yet I insist they do it, attempting to make it as painless as possible, hoping to spark their underdeveloped appreciation for the medium. And so, I can only imagine their reactions if they knew of my desire to commit myself to three years of writing and, beyond that, to a lifetime of it.

During my undergraduate career at Grand Valley State University, the creative writing courses that impacted me the most were Introduction to Creative Writing, taught by Patricia Clark, and Intermediate and Advanced Nonfiction, taught by Ander Monson. It was through these courses that I was introduced to the art of nonfiction writing and began to develop my writing style: memoir-ish, largely dependent on rhythm, often collage, and description; a combination of things I know and things I don’t “officially” know, but know in fragments and are things with which I’m intrigued.

This desire to experiment with the English language—to try new styles, new techniques, new ways to combine words and ideas—to become better—is largely what draws me to the University of Iowa. Tom Fleishmann, a former classmate who is in his first year of the Nonfiction program, tells me that the faculty and students are supportive of each other, and that the program allows students a great deal of freedom to experiment. He tells me that he is happy, is content, is glad to be there. He seems to have found his niche and, after attending the NonfictionNow conference in 2005 and reading the works of John D’Agata, Robin Hemely, and Patricia Foster, I feel that, in this environment, I could, too.

I am eager to begin my graduate studies. Though it has only been a short time since I completed my undergraduate degree, I miss being in a university setting, mixing and expanding with a variety of people, and being involved in educational events. I am eager to take active part again in the workshop process, in its give-and-take, in its communal nature. I yearn for three years of reading and writing and working with and near others who enjoy the written word as much as I do.

A few pieces of my work have been published in journals through Grand Valley, and it is my hope to continue to be published—on a larger scale, with a wider reading audience—and to eventually publish book length manuscripts. In addition to writing, I plan to resume teaching. Ideally, I will be able to move into instructing at the university level, working with undergraduates on their writing and assisting them with the graduate school process, too, continuing the reciprocal nature of teacher and student, though I know that secondary education will still be an option: the writing process simply more forced there than it would be at a college. Regardless of where I teach, I wish to be actively involved in the writing world: attending and participating in conferences, in workshops, and, in general, giving back to the community.