

Personal Statement

Student #2

When I came across The Bellingham Review, with its excellent writing, I was impressed. When I noticed that the poetry editors of this publication were the same writers that I had come to recognize as experts on Creative Nonfiction, I experienced what I call a “nerd rush.” A nerd rush occurs when a nerd such as myself finds a correlation between one seemingly obscure fact they are passionate about and another. In my case, it was the link between creative nonfiction and poetry.

When we planned our independent study of Creative Nonfiction essays my professor, Brent Chesley, recommended Tell It Slant by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola. We found the book helpful with its explanations, examples and exercises to approaching the genre. While the study was designed around creative nonfiction we eventually implemented poetry into the study as well. We just had to.

So when I read that the poetry editors of The Bellingham Review were two of the names I associated with Creative Nonfiction I had to do a little dance.

I have enjoyed the other nerds in the Creative Nonfiction community almost as much as I have the genre itself. Attending the 7th Annual Creative Nonfiction Conference at Goucher College, I learned from Lee “The Godfather” Gutkind, Mary Jo Cartledgehayes, Dinty Moore, who I have recently interviewed, and others. I have also been fortunate to find a mentor in Brent Chesley who allowed me to teach his Creative Writing class while also allotting several hours every week for two independent studies, “Readings in Creative Nonfiction” and “Essays in Creative Nonfiction.”

While I am obviously an advocate of Creative Nonfiction, I also have an interest in poetry. I presented my poem, “My Drunk Guardian Angel,” prior to a reading by Diane Wakowski at Aquinas College. The same poem was also published in the campus publication, The Sampler. Others are in circulation.

While I’ve not come across any of her poetry, I idolize Sarah Vowell for the way she crafts Creative Nonfiction. She constantly places herself in scenarios through which she critiques American politics and culture. And while this subject makes her relevant, her cranky style and sarcastic humor make her enjoyable. This, in essence, is the kind of writer I would like to be. My admission essay is a story about El Salvador as seen through an American perspective. I am interested in the ways Americans perceive foreign cultures, especially third world cultures. Many people respond to this by saying, “Oh, a travel writer.” But this is not quite accurate. My interest does not lie in restaurants, local attractions or a nice tan. It lies in the cultural critique that can be made of Americans through the juxtaposition of other cultures and perspectives.

I have learned very much from my encounters with these perspectives, though they have not always been pleasant. Other experiences that have proved beneficial are those with people who share my interests. It is something that I would like to continue doing as a college professor at a small college. My fellow students and I used to day dream about how wonderful life would be as a professor, integrating further studies of our passions with pleasant exchanges with students. Then I was hit with the brick that is reality. After receiving my bachelors’ degree in English, I began tutoring at the Academic Achievement Center. My first tutoring experience was with a Japanese foreign exchange student and before we could discuss ideas, we first needed to discuss

what each sentence in a twelve-page essay meant. Word by word. Four hours later, we parted, each slightly frustrated and extremely tired. And I couldn't wait to do it again.

After two independent studies in Creative Nonfiction, a workshop, and a conference, Brent Chesley allowed me to teach a session of his Creative Writing class. Despite my nightmares that my teaching would somehow result in mass anarchy, the students seemed receptive. They followed instructions, and even asked and answered questions. While discussing the Creative Nonfiction, one student asked, "So how come you can't add stuff to creative nonfiction? I mean, who's gonna know?" I managed to say something about the creative process dealing solely with truth that would organically result in a better product. What I wanted to say was, "Who would know? Only you, God, and the fact-checkers at any publication you might be so lucky as to be considered by!" Somehow "wrong" just didn't cover it.

I am interested in Western Washington University for the integrity it is known to apply to Creative Nonfiction and other forms of creative writing. I would very much like to work with such a dedicated faculty. And to share many more "nerd rushes."