



University of Pittsburgh Greensburg

Creative & Professional Writing Alumnus Testimonial

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Class of 2007

In the Spring of 2005 I decided to enroll in the writing program at UPG. This despite the fact that I'd written next to nothing in my then 22 years of existence and was, in general, a bad student. I wasn't even allowed to simply sign up for the introductory writing courses that I wanted to take that first semester, but instead had to visit the offices of Professors Vollmer and Murabito in order to first gain their permission. Vollmer looked at me with mistrust and made sure that I knew that hers was a "serious class," while Murabito wanted to know exactly why I'd done so poorly in the composition classes I had taken at the community college before transferring. How could I answer? It was all very embarrassing.

And yet, in spite of everything, over the next two years I somehow miraculously became the first student to be twice awarded the university's Gerald Stern Poetry Prize. I'd like to think now, as I did then, that my success was due to my own talent or intelligence, but I know in my heart that I owe it all to the program I was then a part of. Looking back, I can see clearly how the courses I enrolled in, from the very outset, were tailor made by experienced educators to encourage my growth as a writer; in other words, I was set up to succeed.

One example of this has to do with the Introduction to Poetry class I took that first semester and the books I encountered there. Before taking the class I had read a few poets, but it wasn't until I opened the books selected by Professor Vollmer for our class that I thought, "Oh, I can do this." This sort of thing happened to me again and again as a student, and not just through required reading. I would snatch the names of authors and books right out of the mouths of my professors. The first time I heard the name Pablo Neruda, for instance, was in Professor Jakiela's Introduction to Journalism class. Soon afterwards, I was writing poems that I hoped sounded like Neruda's; I'd found another rung to latch onto, and so had grown a little more as a writer.

But for me the greatest strength of the writing program at UPG is the people who make it up. I am not exaggerating in the least when I say that I have never known greater support and encouragement than I found in the classrooms and offices of all the professors I had the opportunity to work with during my time as a student. I always felt free to stop by their offices to

talk about any book I happened to be reading at the time, whether it was part of the coursework or not, or to simply talk in general. And that's the type of stuff that really matters to a student, whether or not he or she realizes it at the time.

Since graduating from the writing program in 2007 I have twice been offered admission to NYU's Graduate School of Arts and Science. I also received an offer of admission from Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. It's impossible to say exactly why my applications to these wonderful programs have been accepted over the years, but I imagine it's due in large part to fact that their directors mistakenly believe they're offering admission to some talented writer, when in reality they're offering it to me -- someone of very much average intelligence who was simply lucky enough to attend a great writing program staffed by unbelievable teachers who truly know how to bring out the very best in their students.