



University of Pittsburgh Greensburg

Creative & Professional Writing Alumnus Testimonial

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Christopher Carroli

Class of 2006

“You have to go to college to be a writer,” I was told. This was soon after high school, where I’d excelled in English and Journalism more than the rest of my classes. “Besides, there are no successful writers.”

Still, I searched through Journalism majors from a variety of different colleges, fighting off admonitions that I was fishing for something that most had deemed “impractical.” I’d compared the courses of strictly journalistic majors against astronomical tuition fees, and then realized that I wanted something that was not so universally focused on one area of writing. There were other genres that I wanted to explore, fiction and non-fiction among them. What little advice I received from anyone with any knowledge of my craft was unanimous...

“UPG has one the best writing programs around.”

How could this be? I thought. The small campus down the road has one of the best writing programs in the country? It seemed far too coincidental and convenient. I was convinced when I saw the English Writing major in the UPG catalogue. The courses ranged from Journalism and Newspaper, to Fiction, Poetry, Memoir, as well as Public Relations. I realized immediately that this major was exactly what I’d been hoping to find.

For those of us in the major, Professor Lori Jakiela was not only our professor, but our mentor as well, helping us to discover and hone our craft to perfection. Her journalism and newspaper classes were informative, inspiring, and introspective. We experienced journalism from every aspect including writing, listening, and discussing the wide range of current news events as we literally watched them occur. All of it would shape us for “UPG Press,” the class that focused our dedication toward producing “The Insider,” UPG’s weekly campus newspaper. The experience of “The Insider” banded us together as a budding professional news team. We released and distributed the much awaited paper every week and established long-lasting friendships in the process. I served as a reporter in 2005 and 2006, and copy editor in the latter year. I was also thrilled to win the Ida B. Wells Prize in Journalism in 2006.

My experience with creative non-fiction came when I took Jakiela’s Memoir class. The class discussed the memoir as a whole. We learned to write memoir, and by interweaving our writing with humor as well as sadness, it became a journey of self-exploration. It was a joy and an honor to watch Jakiela as her first memoir, “Miss New York Has Everything” was released

during the class. In addition to her role as professor, Jakiela was also my academic advisor. I will never forget how she inspired us and worked tirelessly for her students. She was a true leader during the final Capstone course.

My minor track was fiction. Professor Gary Lutz's "Short Story" and "Composition 3" entailed vigorous attention to fiction writing, details, grammar, and punctuation. There's a common saying at UPG that "you will be a writer when you leave Lutz's class." It is true, and I am so thankful to him because of that. Through it all, I had the support of not only my own professors, but even the writing professors I didn't have for class. Both students and professors seemed united in a front for what we were all hoping to achieve.

Critiquing each other's work served as the workshop aspect of all writing classes. Discovering what others noticed about your work was an essential learning experience. But the learning experience went much farther than writing. We discovered so much about the publishing world of which any new writer would be unfamiliar. We understood the differences between self-publishing, small press, and large press. We became aware of what editors looked for, liked, and disliked.

Choosing the English Writing major was the best choice I've ever made. Though newspaper jobs had been few and hard to come by after graduation, I continued writing freelance for websites and blogs, and persisted in writing my fiction. Then, in 2012, I published my first novel, "Pipeline," with Melange Books. I was contracted to write my series "The Paranormal Investigator," and have published three more books since then. My fourth novel, "The Skinwalker's Tale" will be released on November 21, 2014. The fifth installment in the series is slated for release in late-summer, 2015. I've also published a few short stories and continue my work as a freelance writer as well.

None of my publishing successes could have been achieved if weren't for this program or the extremely dedicated professors who shared not only their time and knowledge, but their extraordinary talents as well.