

I have rooted for the hobbits of the *Lord of the Rings* movie franchise well before my mom knew I was watching. Media was always my form of distraction and escapism, a form that translated into the intricate stories I would create with my toys, where the problems weren't about Dad's deployment or my upcoming spinal surgery. Frodo and the Fellowships' journey led me to discover reading with other beloved characters ranging from Junie B. Jones to Katniss Everdeen. After that, my love for writing quickly emerged where I would explore my own characters. I realized the satisfaction in receiving encouragement and feedback for my stories and sought out a community of writers who were like me. The realm of public school challenged that notion, as I soon discovered the complexities of peer writing communities.

Most of my childhood was spent living on or near an Army base. I was surrounded by welcoming military kids and families, a community of supportive and understanding people. When I moved to a more public school, I faced a strange sense of culture shock. I wasn't greeted by students or teachers, and I was swept to the side with the beginning of the year. Finding my place amongst the affluent was difficult, and I struggled to gain traction in the writing community. I joined writing clubs and took creative writing classes, just to be belittled by my peers for not writing about topics that were "deep" enough. There was a sense of creative freedom, but with the social restraints of what "good" writing entails. I was surrounded by the expectation that "good" writing relied on heavy subjects, that short stories about everyday life didn't count as worthy writing.

When I decided to attend the University of Denver to get my degree in English, a concentration in creative writing felt like the clear choice, despite the rollercoaster that was peer feedback in public school. At the university level, I have been challenged in the reasoning behind my writing choices and asked meaningful questions that have benefited my craft in the long run.

I found the niche that my younger self knew was out there, and thanks to her insistence, it is leading me toward my Honors Thesis in creative writing. I am working to enhance disability representation through my time as a Puksta Scholar and within my Honors Thesis, and a large gap in representation is found in the media. Whenever there is a disabled character, they are usually a source of inspiration for able-bodied characters, written to make the main character feel grateful for what they have. My thesis actively works against this, as I am creating a short story collective that shows disabled characters as the “average” characters – to establish representation within characters my younger self would have appreciated.

Though I cannot be certain as to what my future holds, I know I will consistently talk about writing. In my time working at the University of Denver Writing Center, I have realized the joy I find in discussing other people’s writing. I appreciate discussions that develop plot lines and characters, *and* the conversations focusing on ways to enhance the flow of the sentence. The conversations I’ve had with writers in the Center and in my writing seminars have made me realize the path I want to take; I would like to become an editor at a publishing company. While discussing other’s writing, I feel motivated to continue my own writing and I know that will always be true.

I am giddy at the thought of continuing my education at a university like Regis; enhancing my storytelling skills with a cohort of likeminded students under the guidance of such gifted fiction and non-fiction writers excites me. With the low-residency program, I believe I will be able to invest myself fully in my writing and unite with my cohort to discuss our progress. Simply the idea of sharing stories with fellow learners and writers makes me eager about the experiences we would share. Strengthening my craft in the Creative Writing MFA program would allow me to pursue my style of writing and increase disability representation. I look

forward to the day a young writer reads my work as a source of escapism, providing a glimmer of hope in this harsh world.