

## The Right Place at The Right Time by Kristine Donahue

If you had asked me even a year ago if I would consider returning to school for a post graduate degree, my answer would have been a resounding no. And that's exactly the answer I gave to Anthony D'Aries, program coordinator for Western's MFA in Creative and Professional Writing. I stopped by the vendor table he was manning at a writer's conference in New York City, of all places, back in August of last year. All I wanted was his signature so I could get my free course for visiting all the vendors at that event. I had no idea where those five minutes would lead.

As I'm sure he asked the hundreds of other attendees at that conference, he asked me "why not"?

Why not, indeed. Aside from the sheer cost of college at any level, I faced the barrier of a less than stellar undergraduate performance. In the years after I graduated from Uconn, I had, in fact, looked at pursuing a master's degree in a variety of fields. All of them hitched my future to a GPA that defined who I was as a student and as a person over a decade ago. Doors were closed to me before I'd even had a chance to apply.

"Can you write?" Anthony asked me.

"Yes."

"Then you should apply."

Thus started a journey I most often describe as "the right place at the right time".

Returning to college certainly wasn't an easy sell. I spent weeks emailing back and forth with Anthony and speaking with current students and recent graduates. And I spent a fair amount of soul searching, finally coming to the realization that this wasn't about improving my writing or getting a degree. This was about creating an opportunity for myself.

If it hadn't been for that personal touch, and Herculean effort on the part of my program coordinator, I wouldn't be here. Now that I am, it's the MFA program itself that really excites me. For the first time in my life I'm an active participant in my education. I am in charge of the curriculum, which empowers me to steer my education in a direction that suits me and my goals. This is not one size fits all learning.

That being said, the program demands that I become a well-rounded writer. While my primary focus is fiction, I must pick a secondary focus in a completely different writing style that will help me make writing as a career an even more viable pursuit. And the options for both of these focuses are endless.

Additionally, I'm not bound by the shackles of tuition. Don't get me wrong, college is still very expensive. But I have opportunities to work as a graduate assistant for the university to help defray the cost, of which I am taking full advantage. And as if that wasn't enough, I get to participate in WCSU's literary journal, Poor Yorick, as well.

In the four and a half years it took me to graduate from Uconn, I never once felt like I belonged. Please don't misunderstand me, Uconn is a fine school. It just wasn't the best fit for me. I was adrift in a huge sea of people, with little direction and even less clue as to who I should ask for help. And no matter what

I chose as my major (political science, believe it or not), the curriculum was set and I could fall in line or be left behind. At one point I was very nearly left behind.

But, from my very first day in my MFA program at Western, I have felt like I'm home. I am finally in the right place, at the right time, doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing. At long last, I'm on the right path to my dream career. And WCSU not only opened that door for me, but it all but refused to let the opportunity slip through my grasp. Thank you.