



University of Pittsburgh Greensburg

Creative & Professional Writing Alumnus Testimonial

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Dawn Law

Class of 2002

I'm pretty sure I never told Professor Lori Jakiela what an impact she has had on my life. Between moving, attending community college, working and being a single parent, it took me 12 years to get my degree in 2002 from UPG.

I don't recall newspaper – the only activity I ever participated in – as having much impact. As a commuter, I was always worried about getting to my next destination. I also think I had no natural talent as a writer, but clearly, that wasn't enough to stop me. Looking at my transcript, it was in the fall of 2000 that I had my first class with Professor Jakiela. It was Introduction to Journalism. It was that class or one of the others she taught (Newspaper 1 or Magazine 1) that made me decide on English Writing as a major. Some of my other classes, Basic Acting, Intro to Logic, The American Renaissance, and Constitution and Civil Liberties are a mystery to me. Not sure why I took them or what I got out of them.

To this day, my favorite author is Truman Capote, and my favorite book is "In Cold Blood." Not long ago, I listened again to "Fiasco!" on "This American Life." You wouldn't think the funniest thing you ever heard would involve a small town production of "Peter Pan." It was hilarious because of how the story was told. That's what Professor Jakiela taught me. You can take the most mundane and make it interesting with your words.

My late mentor, Jerry Vondas, is the one who told me I knew how to get "the quote" from people. I began working with him in 2000 at the Tribune-Review in Pittsburgh, writing death notices and obits. Back then, funeral directors would bring in pictures to run with feature stories. I was terrified I would lose one, but Jerry wasn't – he had a drawer full of unclaimed photos. He also told me obits were the most-read part of the paper, and 36 was not too old to embark on a reporting career. I loved being part of the newsroom and was grateful that my peers were glad to be guinea pigs for school projects. In 2003, to be closer to home, I transferred to Greensburg as a style and entertainment reporter for a social column. I still contribute as a freelancer, but I quit in 2006 to take a job in the oil and gas industry. It pays better.

That might sound like a sell-out, but it really isn't. In 2013, I earned a master's in professional writing from Chatham University. And I use my writing every day in my work as a title analyst. My job is to read attorney-prepared opinions related to oil and gas ownership, define defects and

start the process to cure them. It involves research and writing out complicated issues for reports used by other departments and companies.

My education in writing helps me do my job in several ways. In order for my current company to reimburse me for tuition, I had to explain in a memo why writing is beneficial to my position. First, I think it helps with reading comprehension. Second, it helps me express complicated legal issues. Third, the insatiable curiosity and “need to know” instilled in me by Professor Jakiela serves me well. Some people call it being nebbly, but I am curious about everything, and it’s what drives my love of research. Just recently, I found out one of my ancestors likely served in the Revolutionary War, and I’m looking for proof so I can join the DAR. I also met a branch of my family that has been hosting a reunion in Ohio for the past 100 years. I will be going in August. I know this sounds like a cliché, but one day, I’m going to write a book. I work 10 hours a day an hour away from where I live, so I’m pretty busy. But I think it will be some kind of creative nonfiction related to the industry I work in. So, thank you, Professor Lori Jakiela, and UPG. I have finally figured out how much of a change you made in my life.