

English 180, First Place; Instructor, Jo Chapman

Sharing Worlds

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Like most people that I have encountered in my life, I would not consider myself a writer. Sure, I attended high school and even enjoyed English and writing; of course, I was seventeen years old and had not lived much of a life as of yet, nor had I even read that many books at that time. The majority of the reading that I had completed was mandatory, and I had not fully developed my taste for leisurely reading. This month, 17 additional years have passed since those rudimentary writing and reading experiences. My relationship with reading and writing has changed immensely since those days. I read and write daily for pleasure. The reasons for those changes in habits have been due to where my life has taken me. Many of the jobs and careers that I hold require me to write and read more often than I did in the past. By doing so, I am a better writer, have learned to communicate to a broader audience, have become more well read, and I have gained a measured courage and confidence in my writing. The adventures, life experiences, and career paths that I have taken since the days of high school have taught me about who I am as a person and as a writer.

Obviously, the places that I have been and the adventures that I have experienced shape who I am as a writer, as novice as I may be in that field. I served in the Marines at a young age. I was thrust into a war that changed who I am as a man. I saw unexplainable loss, grief, overwhelming tragedy, and endured obstacles and challenges that many will never in their lives experience, thankfully. I have been overseas to the Middle East more times than I can count, both in the military and as an independent personal protection contractor. I am also a firefighter and a paramedic. These careers, as a person who serves, shape me as a writer.

When I think of writing, those are the experiences that I think of, not to sway a particular person of a popular or controversial topic, or to debate the world of politics, but instead, to tell a story. Stories of loss and tales that perhaps open people's eyes to lives lived by others that may be very unlike their own. That includes stories of my friends and brothers that the world has lost. The paths that they chose have crossed mine and influenced me as a writer, whether I want them to or not. I see life and death in a more eloquent sense now due to those "crossing of paths." I feel that I am able to express myself better and have felt an array of tragic emotions that many have not had to face. Those feelings seep through my mind and into the papers that I compose. I find that I try to express my emotions more thoroughly and try to ensure that the adjectives that I choose paint a picture that expresses my thoughts in a judicious manner. All of those experiences have also had a significant positive impact on me as a man and, therefore, as a writer. I have become more mature, pragmatic, and have learned to see the world in a different light with a unique vision. These same attributes seep into any writing that I compose.

During my travels, I have developed a passion for reading. When I open a book, I can escape my life. I dive into a world that may be foreign and has the capacity to be riveting. I have explored many genres and have found writing styles and ways of storytelling that I enjoy and would perhaps adapt to if I were to take a pen to paper. I have explored the surprisingly captivating world of law with John Grisham, the savage history of the mob with Nicholas Pileggi and Mario Puzo, and even the unique world of the Samurai in Asia with James Clavell. Reading such a diverse range of authors and texts has exponentially improved my vocabulary. The improvement has helped me to become more descriptive, and has allowed me to express myself better to the reader. Another benefit of reading that I have found is simply the education of subjects that I would not have necessarily stumbled upon in my day-to-day life. I have learned

about the law, crime, history, medicine and many other topics that weren't covered in my other educational experiences. These additional forms of education help in every topic that I write, or will write about. Of course, all of my tastes and interests in reading evolve every day, and as those evolve I will continue to reap the many benefits. My writing will improve and they will continue to shape my identity as a writer.

As a paramedic, I am required to compose patient care reports after each patient that I interact with. I have been a paramedic for over seven years now in many different environments, regions, and climates. The scenarios that I have encountered evolve and change with those environments. As a writer and a paramedic, I am expected to be able to recreate a scene so that if someone, whether in a medical field or not, picks up my report and reads it, they can understand what happened on that ambulance call and see what treatment I provided that patient. In a sense, it is a form of storytelling, but this type of writing is meant to be objective and should not include any opinions or biased feelings. By doing this over many years, I have acquired a detail oriented and journalistic mentality. I have learned how to fine-tune my ability to compose informative writing and answer the who, what, where, when, and why questions. I have also learned to be able to stay on topic and only pass on the relevant information, which is also a valuable writing skill. My experiences in writing for career purposes have improved my writing overall and help me identify and develop who I am as a writer.

I have learned that as a student writer, I am "wet behind the ears," but I know that I have unique insights into many worlds that others may not have access to. I have unique perspectives on periods of history that others may not have been privy to. Along with those unique insights, I read daily and that ever-growing passion is shaping and evolving my identity as a writer every day. My experiences have made me more mature and pragmatic; my array of career choices have

improved my writing. My variety of literary selections have helped me become more well read, and my experience in journalistic type writing has evolved, allowing me to improve as a writer.

Now only to get the words on paper...