



Wordhord

Beowulf, the troop's captain, unlocked his wordhord and answered. **Beowulf II.258-59**

Spring 2014

Northwestern College
English Department Newsletter

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This Issue

Special Topics	2
Deepsong	4
Martin Honor	5
Senior Profiles	6-10
Alumna Features	11-12
Alumni Notes	13
Opelousas	14

At left, author Francisco Stork talks with student Maria Perez after his lecture to her First Year Seminar class

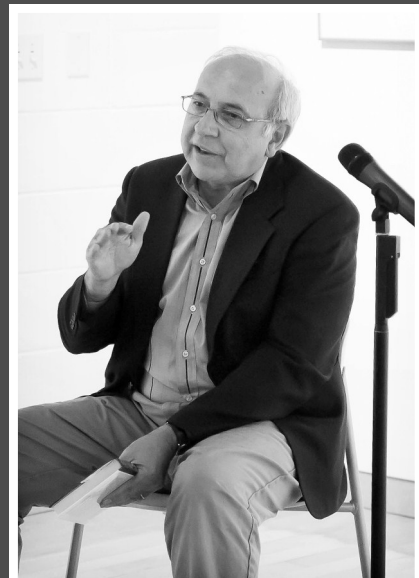
TRADING INSPIRATION: Author Francisco Stork Visits from Boston

By Erin Brassler

A little inspiration can go a long way—or come from far away. As for award-winning author Francisco X. Stork, sharing inspiration with aspiring students and staff of Northwestern College was worth the trip all the way from Massachusetts.

For three days in September, the campus welcomed Stork with eager ears. During Stork's stay in Orange City, he generously took the time to share his writing and wisdom with individual classes and students as well as the entire campus. At a Deep Song event Monday night, he read selected parts of his young adult novel *Marcelo in the Real World* and sparked discussion about the role of religion in his novels. Stork also discussed *Marcelo* with students in Methods of Teaching English and Speech, future English teachers who had already read his book and enjoyed brainstorming with Stork about ways to use this novel in a secondary classroom. In addition, Stork met with multicultural student leaders and three sections of Writing Studio classes, speaking of life and the five published novels that he has successfully authored.

(Continued on page 3)



Francisco Stork, acclaimed novelist & attorney, sharing during a DeepSong reading session

SPECIAL TOPIC COURSES FALL 2014

ENG 380 *Writing Nature Inside & Out* 2 credits

Tuesday/Thursday 1:45—3:15 pm (1st half)

Dr. Ann Lundberg

In *Writing Nature Inside and Out*, we'll explore the natural world from a writer's perspective, seeking to experience how language provides "a vehicle of self-transcending insight" that leads us to a deeper engagement with and understanding of the creation. One ecological role reserved for human beings is to recognize and communicate God's glory as expressed in that creation – and to struggle with the questions the wounded and wounding aspects of that creation raises. Because what we read and write to some de-



gree determines how we think about nature, a major concern of the class will be to address the ethical responsibilities involved in "writing nature." While we study how established nature writers convey out-

wardly the meanings of nature they perceive inwardly, we will practice these methods in our own writing. We will seek a detailed understanding of the natural environment of the Northwestern College campus, northwestern Iowa, and the Tall-grass Prairie region through field guides, presentations on topics such as local geology and prairie ecology, and individual research. In addition to the "inside" study of literature, students will spend time outside recording their observations of the natural world. (Continued on page 3)

ENG 387 *Native American Rhetoric* 2 credits

Tuesday/Thursday 1:45—3:15 pm (2nd half)

Dr. Ann Lundberg

The Founding Fathers, among them Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, noted the rhetorical skills of Native American orators. Today, almost everyone knows that Chief Joseph affirmed that he would "fight no more forever" and that Chief Seattle told us "This we know; the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth." While much interest in indigenous rhetoric has been colored by the idea of the "noble savage" and some examples have proved to be fabrications, it is true that throughout their history, American Indians have continued to draw upon strong rhetorical traditions. God knows they've needed to.



Dwayne Wilcox (Oglala Lakota), "Views of the Reservation"

Contact with Euro-Americans certainly put their rhetorical skills to the test as indigenous peoples increasingly found it necessary to create and maintain arguments in defense of the political and religious liberties of their people and in order to preserve their land base. The purpose of this short course will be to study the development of this rhetorical tradition within the historical context of political oppression and to consider how Indig-

enous rhetors shaped their words for their own people and adapted them to a new audience. We'll pay particular attention to the role of the trickster and the use of humor in Native American rhetoric and to rhetors from the Omaha, Ponca and Sioux Nations in whose homeland we live.

When the time came for Stork to speak in chapel, he chose two passages that fit with the 2013-2014 chapel theme of “Christ-likeness”: Mark 8:36 and Matthew 5:4. In reference to the Mark passage (“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”), Stork shared his own experience of making career choices for the wrong reasons. During his second speech in Christ Chapel, Stork acknowledged the common struggle of mourning, giving hope to listeners by assuring them that “they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). Having lived with depression, Stork could speak from experience.

After Stork returned home, he reflected on his brief stay in Iowa: “I can’t tell you how good it was for me spiritually to spend a few days at Northwestern College.” Back home in Boston, Francisco Stork continues to write, occasionally updating his blog and revising another young-adult book currently titled *Memory of Light*, a story about a young girl who suffers from depression. Stork’s literary success continues to thrive with the recent publication of his essay, “Meditations on Writing and Lawyering” in *Image* journal (Fall 2013). In this piece about his vocational journey, Stork shares his daily morning prayer:

My Jesus, I give you my hands that they may do your work.
I give you my legs that they may walk your way.
I give you my tongue that it may speak your words.
I give you my mind that you may think in me.
I give you my eyes that I may see as you do.
Most of all, I give you my heart that you may love through me.



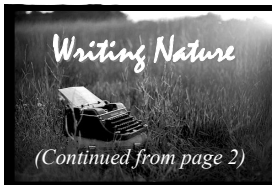
Stork read from a selection of his work during DeepSong in TePaske Gallery



Professor Kim Van Es poses with Francisco Stork following dinner at the Van Es home



Donald Hale listens as Stork lectures to his First Year Seminar class



There *will* be field-trips! A key component of the course is the creation of a notebook recording reflections upon assigned readings, field notes, and responses to periodic eye, ear, nose, mouth, and hand-opening writing prompts. In addition to short writing experiments in poetry and nonfiction, participants will produce a longer creative work.

DEEP SONG READING SERIES

Jessie van Eerden



As part of the *Deepsong* reading series, novelist Jessie van Eerden will read a selection of her works. Her prose has appeared in *Best American Spiritual Writing*, *The Oxford American*, *Image*, and other publications. Her debut novel *Glorybound* has won the Editor's Choice Fiction Prize with *ForeWord Reviews'* Book of the Year Awards.

Tuesday, April 8 - 7 pm

TePaske Gallery, Korver Visual Arts Center



THE ANSWER IS...

Alum **Kristin Trease** '12 recently gave an exam and received this response from one of her high school students.

Test Question: Define *Irony of Situation* and explain how it is used in the story "The Open Window."

Student's answer: The window is closed.



152 Books & 5 Judges 2014 Award gets underway

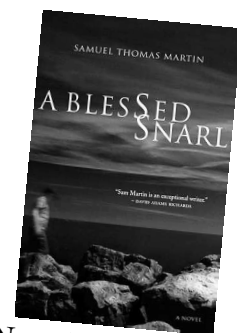
A novel written by Northwestern College English professor Samuel Martin has been long-listed for the 2014 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

Books are made eligible for the award through nominations from public libraries around the world. Over 400 library systems in 177 countries were invited to nominate up to three books for the 2014 award. This year, 152 titles were nominated, including 51 American, 23 British and 11 Canadian novels.

Martin's novel, "A Blessed Snarl," is about Patrick, a Pentecostal pastor who moves his family from Ontario to Newfoundland to begin a church plant. Patrick's life unravels after his wife leaves him, his son moves in with his girlfriend, and he reunites with his estranged father, who may be covering up a past crime.

Nominated by the Newfoundland & Labrador Public Library, Martin joins such distinguished novelists as Peter Carey, Ian McEwan, Colm Toibin, Louise Erdrich and John Irving among the award nominees.

The short list will be made public on April 9, 2014, and the winner will be announced June 12.



**Nominated for
Dublin Award**



Sam Martin pictured here on Fogo Island in Newfoundland.

SENIOR PROFILES

Christine Williams

Literature



After reading three years of English senior profiles, I wondered what I would write. Maybe I would say something about how I have always had a passion for literature, discuss memories of coffee and treats in Granberg and Doorenbos, or how I have been prepared for the next stage in my life because of the English Department. All of these things are true, but while thinking about all of this I came to the conclusion that one thing has meant the most to me: my professors and classmates.

The small classes created camaraderie among fellow students, and professors took a personal interest in me and invested in me. Not at many colleges are you able to go to coffee with your professor, eat dinner at their house, or have a class by arrangement because it wouldn't fit at any other time. The professors challenged me with things I didn't know I was capable of doing.

And now I am thankful they did. There were moments when my professors had more faith in my abilities than I had. For that I am grateful.

And after spending a semester in Chicago and interning at *Today's Chicago Woman* magazine, my next step is applying for jobs in Minneapolis and Chicago, most likely in the publishing field. Whether that takes me to books, magazines, or somewhere else, I'll have to see. But I'll always remember the people that took the time to invest in me, see my potential, and encourage me.

Jonathan De Reus

Writing & Rhetoric/Political Science



I didn't come to Northwestern to major in Writing and Rhetoric. To be honest, I didn't even know the major existed. I simply knew I wanted to major in Political Science, and that was good enough for me. That quickly changed my first semester my freshman year, however, when I walked down the stairs to the basement of Granberg for my first class: The Rhetoric of Persuasion with Professor Turnwall. As everyone who's ever taken a class with her knows, she always held several writing conferences throughout the semester in each of her classes to review student papers before they were due. As she and I got to know each other throughout the course of that first semester, she suggested I consider adding Writing and Rhetoric to my degree as doing so would benefit my legal career someday. Ultimately it was the progress I could see in my own writing after each conference with her that led me to declare Writing and Rhetoric as my second major.

So if I had to pick a favorite memory from my time spent with the English department, I'd have to credit it to my writing conferences with Professor Turnwall. The attention she invested, not only in my writing, but in me personally, motivated me to push myself from writing purely structured, academic papers to loosening my style and to simply enjoy writing for the sake of writing – and for that I'll be forever grateful.

SENIOR PROFILES

Emma Westerholm

Literature/Spanish/Translation & Interpretation

After a boy in my class visited my house once in grade school, he began to tell everyone that I lived in a library. I hadn't realized my house was unusual—I assumed everybody had designated Seamus Heaney shelves organized both by subject and date of publication, multiple copies of every Tolkien book ever written, and the frequent problem of which books to consign to the attic so the new books would fit somewhere on the appropriate shelves.



A wise writer by the penname of Lemony Snickett once said, “If writers wrote as carelessly as some people talk, then adhasdh asdglaseuyt[bn] pasdlgkhasdfasdf.” I grew up surrounded by Tolkien, Lewis, Dickens, and Austen, great writers choosing their words carefully, and from a young age I was frustrated by careless adhsdhkjs. So thank you, English department, for the well-used words. Thank you for allowing me four years to join your revelry in the wonders of language: a heart-stoppingly-beautiful verse, a story told so well I want to concuss to relieve the pain of human existence just placed on my shoulders, a word so perfectly used that I laugh out loud in the quiet of a cozy library corner. Thank you for making me read *Omeros*, for the enthusiastic discussions-turned-lectures on Willa Cather, for taking me down a peg (or five) by teaching me how arbitrary all my “correct” grammar is, for the wake for my beloved Granberg Hall, for the countless cups of coffee, and all your encouragement that pursuing a love of words and a passion for language is never a waste of time.

My future, like any good English major's, is foggy, but I plan to continue choosing words carefully as a translator, somewhere.



Jocelyn Van Dyke

Writing & Rhetoric

After graduation I will start work at Vermeer Corporation as the Communications Specialist for the Forage Marketing team.

SENIOR PROFILES

Kelly Burds

Literature

I plan to see the world and plant roots in it. Always subject to the whims of chance and finances, of course.



Four Years

College made me a senior citizen at twenty-two.
my head so full of memories it feels like
my size four year education will burst at the seams,
but the story holds
my past and maybe even my future, if I'm lucky.

I've learned to read people and psychoanalyze books,
and used that learning to make *art*.
I've spun yarns while crocheting afghans
so someone after me can be embraced by the warmth of story.
I've been taught by all the Usual Suspects—
and some unusual ones too.
I've wept like a child on my dorm room floor at three a.m.

I've built a nest and a flock in the middle of this cornfield
but spring is coming, migration is a fact of life and,
as scary as it may be, I will be okay
and so will you, the ones I leave behind.

Rachel Te Grootenhuis

Literature

After I left Dordt without finishing, I had a reoccurring nightmare: I was signing up for classes and forgot to go class or couldn't find the room. Although I quit voluntarily, obviously my inner self did not agree with my decision. Fast forward 30 years through being a farm wife, four kids, a demanding job in a prosecutor's office, selling the farm, moving twice, and a new job at Northwestern (NWC) to 2004 when I wondered how long it would take to get a degree. After a transcript review, I still needed to take a lot of classes, and I couldn't decide on a major. A few years later I realized I qualified for an associate degree at Dordt, which meant an easier path to graduation at NWC!

(Continued on page 9)



SENIOR PROFILES

Rachel Te Grootenhuis

(Continued from page 8)

The final piece of the puzzle fell in place Fall 2011 when I saw the course “Reading/Writing Creative Nonfiction” advertised. My inner voice said, “Take it!” Following the Spirit’s nudging isn’t always easy, but this time I listened. The course was amazing, and Richard Sowienski encouraged me to consider taking more classes. Some type of English major was a definite, and Literature worked out the best. Thanks to summer classes, night classes, and creative scheduling, I hope to graduate this summer!

Being a non-traditional student causes strange moments in class: remembering the actual event that’s called history, getting an apology when people my age are called “old,” and being the leftover when pairing up for projects (a replay of high-school nightmares). One of my fears was I might talk too much in class, so I apologize to professors and classmates when I wouldn’t shut up. Another fear was being totally out of touch with traditional students, and I am, but they were nice to me anyway. Thanks to all of you, professors and fellow students, for listening to my stories without rolling your eyes and helping me feel a part of the English Department.

For my future plans, I don’t plan on switching jobs, but I will love checking the “college graduate” box on forms I fill out! Who knows what the future holds? I don’t, but God does and my prayer is I will listen to his quiet call.

Natalie Church

Writing & Rhetoric



I wasn’t going to be an English major.

I knew in high school that I’d be writing for the rest of my life. The idea, though, of studying English at college seemed really, really silly. I could write, I had been doing it for ages, and was maybe a little arrogant about my abilities as compared to my peers’ – why should I spend thousands of dollars and at least four

years learning to do something I was already practiced in? So I was practical – I entered college majoring in business administration. That lasted a semester. I appreciated the order of accounting, but business is not my great love.

I think in many ways I was afraid to confront what seemed then like such a fantastical (here referencing mainly the “fantasy” part of that word, with a bit of the “great” part, too) goal. I was afraid of saying that I wanted to write, of thinking that writing was something I could actually legitimately do, of the conversations where I might have to justify a life spent pursuing words. I was afraid that I didn’t really have anything useful or original to say; I was afraid that I didn’t have any real skill. Even though I knew after one semester that business wasn’t where I wanted to stay, it took me until my second year to actually change my major.

I have consistently learned one thing through the whole of my time here: my knowledge is extremely limited. There are more layers to every aspect of life, in every area of study, than we have been lead to believe – to approach any topic presuming mastery of it is to short oneself. I thought I knew writing, that spending time and money learning writing would be wasteful, that experience would be the only worthwhile educator, that I could just figure it out on my own. It’s amusing to me how thoroughly wrong I was.

My time with the professors here has given me far more than I could have accomplished in the same amount of time on my own. It’s not just that I’ve learned, though I have: it’s that, in this place with these people, I have found a safe and encouraging space to practice, to learn, to mis-step and get things wrong, as well as hands to help me find my way again. I have learned to be vulnerable *(Continued on page 10)*

SENIOR PROFILES

Deborah Admire *Writing & Rhetoric*



When I first transferred to Northwestern, I freaked out. I found myself lost in a forest of geniuses, completely overwhelmed by the terrifying expectations of the professors and intimidated by the brilliance of my fellow students. Coming from Northwest Vista Community College (Vista) where teachers cried with joy if you'd heard of Beowulf before (or after) their English lit class, I was fairly certain I was hopelessly behind, underdeveloped, and dumb.

And yet, I wasn't. After a semester, I found myself at home here, still challenged by my classes but not dreading them. Looking back, I think the hardest part of settling into the English department was finding Doorenbos Cottage.

Looking back at my college experiences as a whole, some differences between Vista and Northwestern stand out:

- At Vista, I learned that Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameter. At Northwestern, I learned that he did so because that is the rhythm of the English language, inherited from French (thank you, Dr. Kensak).
- At Vista, I learned that the setting of an artistic work is important. At Northwestern, I've learned that a place is a character in and of itself (thanks, Dr. Fynaardt).
- At Vista, I learned that comma mistakes should be corrected in other people's papers. At Northwestern, I learned that the writer is more important than the rule (thank you, Professor Truesdell).
- At Vista, I learned that rhetoric... exists? At Northwestern, I learned that rhetoric is this beautiful confusing perplexing demanding theory that pervades everything, and that I fell madly in love with and still can't explain to my parents (much thanks, Dr. Lundberg).
- At Vista, I learned that a personal essay contains five paragraphs and is about me. At Northwestern, I learned that it's a challenging exploration of your own psyche... or someone else's, if you're reading theirs (thank you, Professor Sowienski).

At Vista, I went it alone, always. I had one class with a friend—the rest were all full of strangers who remained strangers throughout the semester. At Northwestern, I'm surrounded by my English department family. We know each other's troubles, support each other's endeavors, and provide feedback and encouragement. At Vista, I didn't approach the professors much—they were busy, important, and intimidating. At Northwestern, the professors approached *me*. English profs are funny, intense, weird, at times frighteningly intellectual, and human, something I didn't know because I'd never had a conversation with one.

I've loved Northwestern. I learned some important things from my Vista experience, yes. But at Northwestern, I didn't just learn—I flourished.

Natalie Church *(Continued from page 9)*

in ways I did not believe I was capable, have come to recognize the immeasurable value of a group of friends who critique honestly, have found the richness of listening fully to the stories of others. I have found in my professors not just experienced instructors, but human beings with patience who take genuine interest in their students as individuals. I have found in my classmates opinions to challenge my own, ideas to reshape my paradigms and offer alternative lenses with which to process the world. I have found people who believe in me and my abilities, somehow also giving me the ability to believe in myself.

And I wasn't going to be an English major.

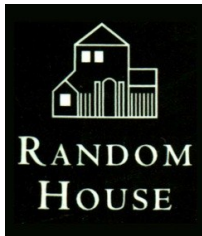
Contemplating The Next Step in my Career



Photo by Adam Patrick Jones

To say my career to date has been guided by my English major would be to suggest Ahab had a fondness for the whale: a gross understatement. While most professors and fellow students at Northwestern would agree that I was far from chatty in class and my essays were often less than remarkable, four years in Granberg Hall earned me a diploma which declared to the world: I am a person who cares about books.

This, of course, had always been true. I had the privilege to read good books every day while earning my degree, something I did before I applied and something I've continued to do ever since. But with this title to claim on my resumé, and to bond with new friends in new cities, it was as if I'd been shown the secret handshake to a grown-up world that was now mine to explore.



Following graduation, I applied for internships at publishing houses across the country. I nailed an interview with W. W. Norton by chatting effortlessly with my future boss about Indian literature and the Bengali culture. (Thanks to Dr. Westerholm, I've carried a torch for Indian writers for nearly a decade now). For the next six years, I would live in Manhattan and work as a managing editor: first at Simon & Schuster, then at Random House, helping to bring cookbooks, novels, and memoirs to life. My tiny studio apartment was brimming with free books I often lugged home from the office.

But life, like any good story, needs a plot twist: four months ago I quit my job in publishing, and moved to Utah as a seasonal publications manager for Sundance Film Festival. This job, similar to that of a managing editor, required an astute attention to detail, remarkable organization, and a breezy ability to manage a wide variety of personalities. Would I be so adept at these skills had I never been required, as an English major, to immerse myself in multiple narratives a week?... To mull over a seemingly random turn of phrase for days on end?... Or debate with roommates the merits of poetry and still enjoy a dinner together at the Caf?



Those days at Northwestern College were critical in teaching me how to develop my own story, and to respect and learn from the stories of those wholly unlike myself. My position at the Festival concluded (last week!) and I'm now preoccupied with completing a flurry of job applications; but I'm not worried. I know that tension is what creates the most interesting narrative arcs. And that while the English Major listed on my resume may get me in the door (as it always has), it's the tenacity and resilience I've learned from characters in the novels I love that will keep me there. Until of course, it's time to write a new chapter.

[Special thanks to Dr. Kensak, whose thoughtful prompts in my College Writing course inspired me to become an English major in the first place]



* See below for photo captions

What do I do with my ENGLISH MAJOR?

My senior year at Northwestern, I wept Anne-of-Green-Gables-style into my pillowcase, praying that a job would fall from the sky. It ended up falling from cyberspace instead, in the form of an online listing for an intern position at an Internet Company – one that sold wine.

At that point, my almost-husband Cody and I had mapped out our post-graduation plans. We were moving to Sonoma County, California, where he would apply his Williams College Political Science degree to work a harvest job cleaning juice-stained winery equipment into the wee hours of the morning.

I reached out to the co-founder of the wine website, and a few cross-country phone conversations, two days of driving and one interview later, I spent my first day as a Marketing Assistant deciphering the mystifying wine bottles that lined my desk. I scrolled through page after page of Spanish, French and German winery websites (*vino, vin, Wein*), thanking God for my years dabbling in these languages alongside my English degree.

I left that company 19 months later as Marketing Project Manager, eager to take my virtual wine knowledge into physical practice. While I was exercising my adjective skills writing about wine, Cody was landing himself an Assistant Winemaker position in record time. (I call it “Liberal Artsing.”) Before his new job began in July of 2013, we delivered our precious Golden Retriever into Cody’s mom’s capable hands and jaunted south to New Zealand for our third harvest. I picked grapes and stirred yeast into wine-filled barrels, stickier than I’d ever been in my life, but enamored by the beauty of a vine and its fruit’s fermentation.

I now am scurrying around at my dream job coordinating digital marketing and communications for a small Sonoma winery. As always, my days are defined by language as I add word after word to my vino vocab list (*malolactic, oenological, phylloxera, vinous*) and ramp up my Marketing Acronym Index with the likes of SEO, ROI, CTR, and QPR.

(Continued on page 13)

*Photo in upper left - Emily & Cody on a beach in New Zealand; lower left - Emily’s grapey hands as she picks Chambourcin in Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand; middle - Their awesome Golden Retriever Kinley showing off wine barrels at Bedrock wine Co. where Cody is assistant winemaker; far right - Emily behind the Tasting Bar at Ram’s Gate Winery where she works as Branding & Communications Coordinator

NEWS FROM ALUMS

STAYING CONNECTED



Mary-Celeste Schreuder '05

In January 2014, Mary began a new position teaching American Literature at Powdersville High School in Greenville, SC.

Daniel Berntson '06

Daniel is (still) studying philosophy as a graduate student at Princeton University. He recently convinced himself that blackboards, tables, books, and papers don't exist, so no longer has any idea what he was up to as an English major. Fortunately, at least some Northwestern English professors do exist. He leaves it as an exercise to the reader to guess which ones.

Katie Hohnstein-Van Etten '08

Katie graduated from the Evergreen State College (Olympia, WA) Master in Teaching program in June 2013. She is in her first year of teaching at Nelsen Middle School in Renton, WA. She teaches 6th grade students the arts of critical thinking and persuasive writing in her humanities classes and enjoys fart jokes. Her husband, Erick, and cats, Cali and Nala, frequently join Katie in looking out into the rainy Seattle skies from their apartment while she drinks strongly brewed caffeinated teas. Katie looks forward to the year 2054, when she may actually come close to paying off her student loans.

Heidi (Sandbulte) Vanden Top '10

Heidi spent two years in the Harrisburg, SD school district as a tutor, and is now employed at the Sioux Center middle school as a resource room paraprofessional for grades five through eight. She enjoys the opportunity to work with students across various disciplines and age groups and learns something new every day! She is pursuing an endorsement in special education through the online program at Morningside College.

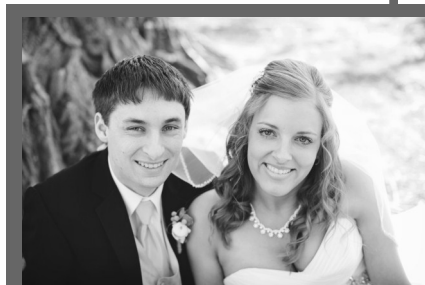
In April, 2013, Heidi married Josh Vanden Top. A few months after their marriage, they welcomed a new addition to their family—a puppy, Lia. They reside in Sioux Center, Iowa and enjoy Storm Watching travel in the spring.

Amanda Kuehn '09

Amanda is now working as an assistant creative non-fiction editor for MARY, St. Mary's literary magazine. She is also a writer for the Lamorinda Weekly and a writing tutor at Acalanes High School in Lafayette, CA.

Chelsea Stanton '11

After two years with the Episcopal Service Corps in Atlanta, Chelsea will begin her MA at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities with a concentration in Leadership toward Racial Justice.



Josh & Heidi (Sandbulte) Vanden Top

What do I do with my ENGLISH MAJOR? (Continued from page 12)

I write, I design, I get paid to be on Facebook, and mostly, I try to advocate my credo that wine is a creation, a craft - wine itself is not a thing to be worshipped, but its Creator sure is. With every grape, both fresh and fermented, that crosses Cody's and my path, I can't help but picture Jesus' words from John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." The Lord's plan has blessed us beyond anything I could have asked or imagined from my tear-stained pillowcase. To my hysterical question, "What do I do with my English major," God had His answer. Incidentally - and I say this with as little blasphemy as possible - it was the same as my lit professors' responses: "*Anything.*"

Prof, Alum & Students

Co-Teach in Opelousas over Spring Break

Reflections on our experience by Emma Westerholm

A tired-looking banner hanging in the hallway reading “Every student at Opelousas Junior High will learn” seemed almost ironic as I scanned over midterm report cards to see which students were in danger of failing a class or five. Well over half the students would be taking home an academic alert note for their parents to sign along with their grades. I wondered briefly just what they were learning.

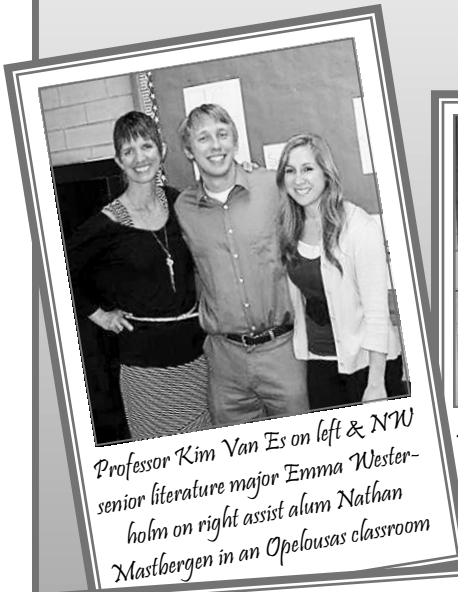
For two days members of our spring service group were in Mr. Mastbergen’s seventh grade English classroom, the class studied metaphor and poetry. After a brief encounter with Emily Dickinson and Robert

Frost, the kids set to work deciphering Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 130*, section by section. Though they squirmed in their chairs with the restless energy of 7th graders, they were clearly interested as they asked questions and made guesses. They were amused by words that came up - intrigued that someone was writing a poem about how ugly his love was - eager to figure out whether the writer would get a better-looking mistress by the end of the poem (and a little disillusioned when he didn’t). They ended the class period working on poems of their own.

The next day they moved to contemporary poetry, looking at a Tupac Shakur poem and rap and an Alisha Keys song before finishing their own poems and reading them to one of the adults. Some had shrugged off

the assignment and scribbled a few lines about their favorite foods or basketball stars, but some took the opportunity to give powerful imagery of nightmares they’d had or to talk about the violence they see all around them. Most of the students wanted us to hear their poems, to show us what they’d created.

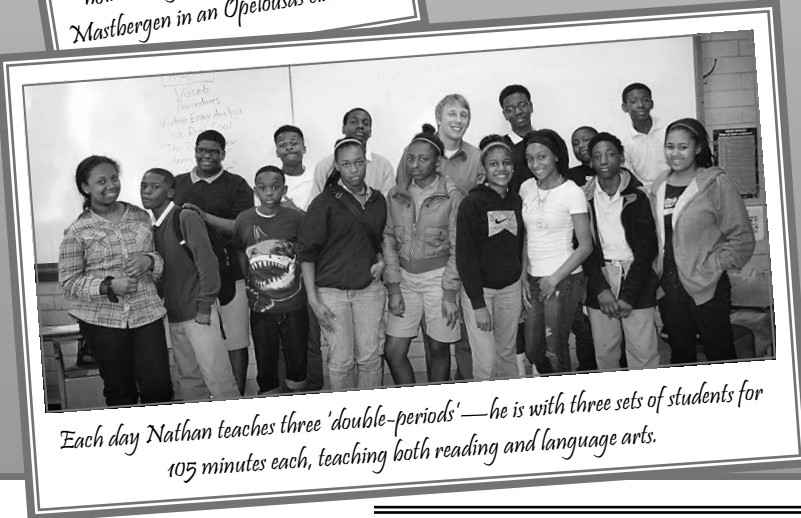
The truth of the banner was right there in that classroom: despite themselves and the “not cool” stigma of doing homework and caring about school, despite the poverty of their city, despite the violence and danger surrounding them, these students were learning - not only about how to work a metaphor into a few hastily scrawled lines they can call poetry, but to think and analyze even when it comes to a classic rap with a good beat. They learned that they are capable of using words to create something worthwhile.



Professor Kim Van Es on left & NW senior literature major Emma Westerholm on right assist alum Nathan Mastbergen in an Opelousas classroom



Nathan Mastbergen, 2013 English Teaching alum, teaches 7th grade Language Arts at Opelousas Junior High—known as OJ—in Louisiana



Each day Nathan teaches three 'double-periods'—he is with three sets of students for 105 minutes each, teaching both reading and language arts.



After working in various schools, NW education students met Nathan at the Java Square Coffee Shop to debrief

Some of the NWC students who served in the schools are pictured above, left to right, front row, Aimee Harmelink; second row, Alum Nathan Mastbergen, Allison Reinsma, Cassie Westpfahl, Emma Westerholm; back row, Kyle Cleveringa and Brit Elms.

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 Northwestern College English Department
 Compiled & edited by: Professor Ann Lundberg
 Formatted by: Karen VanDerMaaten