

NATHAN COLLINS ALUMNI EDITOR

INTERVIEWED BY KATIE ANDERSON

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Can you tell me about your work with *Watershed*?

I was doing my graduate school coursework (Fall 2011 - Spring 2014) at a difficult time for the English department. We had lost our home on campus (RIP Taylor Hall) and were in a kind of limbo in the Siskiyou building. The Humanities & Fine Arts department was under great budget scrutiny as well, but Dr. Zhang was fighting for us, making arguments for every penny of funding. In this climate, we had to make the new *Watershed* really special to justify funding it. The original *Watershed* was disbanded in 2010, a little before my time. These were dark times!

In early 2012, Prof. Sarah Pape organized a small cohort of graduate students, with the purpose to revamp our literary journal for the online-age of literary publishing. This was an all-volunteer effort. These early meetings were akin to planning a start-up company. We made crucial design decisions, adopted a logo, created a basic web design, adopted a submission system, and with a nod to our heritage, we digitized the old archives of *Watershed*.

In late 2012, we sent out calls for submissions. Our creative friends, contacts in creative writing and the academic community, sent small pieces our way, and encouraged their friends to do so. We also advertised in literary journals. We were immediately astonished by the volume and quality of the work we received. There is so much good writing out there looking for a home.

Before reading, however, we had to adopt an aesthetic. Sarah had the basic idea to "Get weird on me!" that is, looking for pieces of writing that walk that fine line between disorienting discomfort and pure logophilia. And we went from there. We also adopted the idea of "Humane Rejections" that is, a rejection letter that is NOT a form letter. Offering kind words, support, and feedback to every writer who submitted their work to us. I wrote all of these for this first issue for our prose submissions, to establish the form.

One of my favorite pieces from this first new *Watershed Review* is "Pulsar Watches" by Fred Arroyo. Deeply moving flash fiction. The Spring 2013 issue of *Watershed Review* was a huge success. And it was made with a very small team, all-volunteer, directed by the wonderful Sarah. We were CLMP accredited shortly after. The Fall 2013 issue, I served as Prose Editor-in-Chief, leading a volunteer group of students to read, discuss, and make selections on our work.

And in Spring 2014, *Watershed Review* was offered as class for the first time, which, I informally co-taught/TA'd with Sarah, again leading as the Prose Editor-in-Chief. We also attended AWP for the first time. I drove my Honda Civic to Seattle, stuffed with my Smith-Corona typewriter, some live-edge wooden displays that I had made, and all the rest of the *Watershed Review* booth stuff. And we had several days of networking and total publishing-nerd-bliss. I watched an author that we had just accepted a small piece from for the forthcoming issue, Eva Saulitis, read on a giant stage with Gary Snyder (a monolith of nature poetry and a personal hero). That semester I was honored with the Ellen G. Walker award for Excellence in Editing and Publishing.

Has English 415 had any influence on what you are doing today?

When I took the class, I was already so committed to and deep in the editing / publishing of *Watershed Review* that ... it taught me more about how to teach writing / publishing than

anything. It was a wonderful experience, and I think definitely was part of what set me on the path that I'm on now -- getting a teaching credential. It also taught me about my own creative aesthetic and helped me add to my own creative voice. Also, how to submit your work! That was eye opening for me.

I ended up not pursuing publishing as a career (while some former editors have and are now in wonderful positions, one former editor is working on President Obama's autobiography!) and, while part of me regrets that, I wasn't ready to go down that path when it was in front of me. But it's always in the back of my mind! Once I have more time, I plan to get back at it by volunteering to read for some of my favorite literary journals, who are often looking for readers / editors. And get back to writing creatively and submitting my work. There isn't much money in this business outside of the big houses, but, like I said before there's so much writing that out there that needs a home. Of course, with my teaching credential, whatever high school I end up teaching at will certainly have a literary journal after I get there, if they don't already.

What advice would you offer anyone looking to submit work to the magazine?

If you're looking to submit to *Watershed Review*, find your shortest, most immediately effective piece. And hone it down to a razor's edge. Take chances, don't be afraid to try something new and different in writing. We have a history of publishing "weird" stuff. And, don't be afraid of rejection, either. With "humane rejections" you will get some substantive feedback. *Watershed Review* is singularly unique in the world of literary journals for these reasons.

Would you recommend the class to any prospective students?

It's rare to go to a college that has such a strong and highly-regarded literary journal.

Take advantage of the incredible experiences that *Watershed* offers, if you have any interest in creative writing or publishing. It will open doors for you in that world.

What advice, if any, would you give to any students who might be considering taking the class?

Be prepared to challenge what you-thought-you-knew about creative writing and the publishing world. If you take your work, and the work of the journal seriously, you may very well find yourself published by the end of the course. *Watershed* is a collaborative, creative environment, purpose-built to make you a better reader, and in turn, a better writer. I can say that I've been offered jobs because of my work in *Watershed* and the connections I made from being in it. Once a *Watershed* editor, always a *Watershed* editor.