

Breath or air? Sweat or rain? My words or theirs? I make my living carving, cutting, and conjuring the language of others, my creative efforts buried beneath a mound of obligations and intentions. I'm grateful for the diverse set of writers and students who believe in me. They possess provocative ideas and insights, and it is a privilege to act as a sounding board. But, in truth, I am always longing for more time to surface and sift through my own voices and visions.

For two decades, I have served in various roles and environments to empower people through creative exploration and expression, as an educator, grantwriter, editor, and artist. I have chosen all of these incarnations based on a personal precept: I want my words to matter, and I want to help others make theirs matter too. In the classroom, on the page, in my community, I have attempted to forge words into an energetic force that both inspires and embodies movement.

I always knew that my professional path would be grounded in service, and that its vehicle would be language. My process of discovery bears the imprint of urban centers and wilderness, consistent advocacy for the homeless community, and the pursuit of a dual PhD in African American and American Studies, amidst other vital concerns and experiences. My critical, empathic, and creative eye casts attention to the shadowy and interstitial, to borders, edges, and corners. These frontier zones have afforded new perspectives, vivified salient issues, and materialized solutions unseen from other vantage points.

I was exposed to the interdisciplinary model of learning at an early age, an approach that revolutionized my way of thinking about the world. Fields of inquiry, traditionally bifurcated into subject areas and discrete cultural forms, were dynamic and interconnected rather than static and bounded. I zoomed in and zoomed out: seeking to pierce and plumb the depths, then surrendering monocular vision to grasp relationships and context. Moving on to advanced study, then teaching, I retained the desire to be ravaged and redeemed by wonder.

As an educator, I was tasked with imposing rigid assessment criteria and standardized rubrics on my students. The necessity of quantifying creative and intellectual efforts and producing a "grade" provoked innate resistance, and I felt an unsettling inertia alongside a sense of confinement. My eventual decision to leave the formal academic arena was not an easy one to make. But it has blazed a new trajectory of growth and service. I now work to help my students and clients clarify, set, and meet their *own* goals for creative growth. Together, we determine the contours and criteria for appraisal. Our partnership generates spirited conversation, exuberant expression, and, above all, a level of confidence and self-actualization that was hard-fought and, for many, elusive in a traditional classroom.

Every summer, I spend eight weeks driving cross-country, running, and tent-camping in some of the most remote and desolate areas. A homecoming wide and deep, vast in space and

layered in time: air, sky, dirt, salt, sand, sea, mountains. I shed, scatter, disappear, and recompose. Geography as biography. Movement and/as matter.

Friedrich Engels declared that “history often proceeds by jumps and zigzags.” This maxim applies equally to biography. How does one frame a “life’s story”—plot it in time and space as potentialities emerge, collapse, and fade away? Different roads take us in turn—winding, climbing, washing out, verging toward a precipice, or rambling on into seemingly infinite vistas—their topography and character cradling and carving the precious sheath we call a self. Intersections force confrontation and choice, amidst uncertainty, doubt, and at times paralysis. I have faced many, and chosen blindly far more than wisely. My art and vocation prioritizes this intrinsic nonlinearity and haphazardness—the leaps, sidesteps, accidents, and dodginess—of personal and collective history.

My life is not framed by curation or resolution. I have embraced the shards and jagged edges, the stitching and the seams, the excrement and odors, the irredeemable staleness and irreducible mystery of living, and pieced it together to form something shimmering and substantial, yet ultimately ephemeral. An uneven path—forging me onward, beseeching me to apprehend the world with unflinching openness and longing.