That higher education is changing in ways that would defy Emmit Brown’s flux capacitor is old news. Nonetheless, those of us who teach writing find certain changes especially interesting, and this newsletter tries to capture a few reasons why. I’ve written a piece about decisions that writing programs need to make in the face of digital literacies, Lance Massey talks about reading, and Angela Sowa reports on a lecture by an eminent visitor, Kathleen Blake Yancey.

The Writing Program has sponsored a number of workshops for faculty across campus this quarter; see page 5 for more information.

Perhaps the happiest change in the program is the addition of six new lecturers. Blurs about them are on page 8. For detailed profiles of five “almost new” writing faculty, see the extensive interviews starting on page 9.

A quick note about this newsletter. We’ve gathered here articles originally (and mainly) published online, realizing that some folks might prefer everything in one spot.
“Academic Writing in the Age of Tweets”

Doug Hesse

In the preface to his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson declared, “May the lexicographer be derided who . . . shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay.” Thus Johnson affirmed that dictionaries should describe, not prescribe, should explain language as they find it, not dictate how they wish it were.

Gregg Kvistad and I recently discussed a related current version of this controversy. Scholars in rhetoric and composition studies now debate the merits of teaching “legacy” forms of writing v. “emergent” ones. After all, there’s a vast gap between the traditions of academic writing, especially as we’d idealize them and the discourse that actually happens beyond campus. One needs look no further than current political campaigns to see what’s at stake, when “what works” is not necessarily “what’s best.” While professors understandably prefer rational deliberations based on assertions, reasoning, and evidence, we actually experience slogans and bon mots, what David Denby characterized a couple years ago as snark (*Snark*, Simon and Schuster, 2010). Our current political discourse (which likely never had some bygone golden age, anyway) is but one plot in a communicative landscape that ever less resembles the well-kept textual lawns of DU, seeded with extended prose, ideas triangulated against other ideas, cited and nuanced.

That’s not to say essayistic literacy (to choose the shorthand term of art) is dead. *Harpers* and *The New Yorker* persist, whatever their circulations, and all those Kindles and I-Pads are filled with books. Still, there’s no doubt that people read and write today differently than we did twenty years ago. We search, link, publish, redirect, and comment, often in multiple channels at once. Memes about binders appear even before a speaker sits down. Texts can be endlessly revised, supplemented, referenced, and remixed. Digital literacy prizes multimodality: the ability to compose in image and sound as well as text. Can convey enormous amounts of information through these exciting channels: writing a piece about Picasso’s *Guernica*? Put in a picture. Contrasting the Lydian and Dorian modes? Insert a sound clip. These new modes increasingly matter not only in the entertainment, civic, and social realms, but also in the workplace—and even in the academy, though we’re slower than most, and although slow isn’t necessarily bad.

A university writing program that sought only to maximize pragmatic skills for digitized discourse might put relatively little stock in ten page double-spaced Times New Roman. Sure, traditionalists could invoke that
whole “liberal arts” business, the sort of thing that has accountants taking history and graphic designers taking physics. But, invoking the liberal arts strikes ever more folks these days as a little quaint. Greek, anyone? So the field of composition studies is wrestling with how much new media (of course hardly new at all by now) to teach. What kinds of reading, writing, and production skills should we feature in required courses?

Now, the extended essay is hardly dead, nor should we desire its demise. There are writing situations and purposes that require explicit connected prose. An October 19, 2012 New York Times article by Steven Sloman and Philip Fernbach (“I’m Right! (For Some Reason)”) shows that when politically strident individuals are asked to explain how policy ideas like “cap and trade” or “sanctions on Iran” would actually work, their views moderate. Why? Unpacking complex systems forces people “to confront their lack of understanding.” Arguing or justifying one’s position doesn’t. Essayistic reasoning has a place, then—even an ethical place—in writing.

Just how big should that place be, though? This question ought to concern faculty across campus, not just those who teach first year writing. For example, what should be the ratio of essays to videos that history faculty would have their students produce? The ratio for psychology of blogs to papers? For marketing of highly visual brochures to standard reports?

It’s not just a question about old media v. new. There’s the matter of genre and audience. Even sticking to purely conventional texts of words and paragraphs, should students write for disciplinary audiences or should they write for broader educated publics? In other words, should they be writing for Science, Scientific American, The New York Times, or The Huffington Post? I think most of us haven’t satisfyingly answered that question for ourselves, often defaulting to a kind of bastardized discourse that has some trappings of journal articles in our fields (marked by fussiness over MLA or APA citation conventions, for example). We subconsciously treat our sophomores and juniors as graduate students even as we know they aren’t—and likely will never be. We might see disciplinary writing as writing calisthenics for other types, but research on whether and how writing skills transfer to new or different situations is pretty cautionary; success depends at least in part on students having some conceptual scaffolding.

If you twisted my arm, I’d come down on the side of students writing for different kinds of readers in the same course, for expert disciplinary audiences, certainly, but also for smart lay audiences. And if you twisted my arm really hard, I’d argue for more “public” or “popular” writing, especially in general education courses. I’d argue for more traditional prose than for new media, but I’d want a place for both. Most vitally, I’d argue that students need to learn about differences in types of communication; for example, they might contrast different types of texts, for different readerships, in the same course. Students should grasp the virtues and limits of different genres and modes of communication—their affordances and constraints, to use the current fancier terminology. Professors should help them value and connect the different kinds of writing they’ll encounter in the academy, the workplace, the polis, and their interpersonal lives.

The academy should, finally, be a place where “what should be” matters, including when it comes to writing. We need to temper “what’s popular and works” with the best visions of our individual and social potential. At the same time, we can’t be so wedded to tradition that we totally dismiss new forms of discourse. After all, 257 years ago, Dr. Johnson defined the essay itself as “a loose sally of the mind; an irregular and undigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition.” (It’s hard not to think of this as slightly prescriptive, despite Johnson’s avowal in the Preface; after all, he famously defined “oats” as “a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.”) To the credit and benefit of writing, we seem to made pretty fair use of this undigested genre over the past couple centuries.
News from the Writing Center: Impact, Outreach, Research

Even in temporary quarters during the Penrose renovation, under the leadership of Dr. Eliana Schonberg, the University Writing Center increased its consultations in 2011-2012, conducting 3,658 individual appointments with 1,785 different students. About half were graduate students, about half undergraduates. A greater percentage of undergrads than in previous years were sophomores and seniors, suggesting that the Center is increasingly valuable to students in majors courses. (Numbers of junior-year writers remain lower due to the number of those students who study abroad.)

Beyond tutorial consultations, Center staff (including Schonberg and eight Writing Program faculty) conducted 84 one hour in-class workshops, a substantial increase from previous years. These workshops provided additional instruction for approximately 500 undergraduate and 325 graduate students. Prior to each event, two Writing Program faculty consulted at length with the inviting faculty member, then designed a fitting activity.

The Center also conducted 32 brief class introductions of its services to students and faculty. We also presented at orientation events for the Graduate School of Social Work, the Daniels College of Business, the Morgridge College of Education, the Korbel School of International Studies, as well as all of the International House orientations for incoming international students and graduate student and orientation events during Discoveries Week.

New in 2012 are student writing groups. Originated by Center consultants, the groups provide a forum for students to share work in progress and get feedback from peer writers. While their format may best suit students working on long projects like graduate theses or research projects, they’re open to all interested writers. Some groups are discipline specific; some are open; some are facilitated by Center staff, some are self-organized. For more information, see http://duwriting.org/?page_id=574.

The Center is conducting two research projects of note. One is an ongoing joint study with Kansas State University and Pomona College on the strategies and processes that students transfer from individual consultations to other writing settings. With financial support from the writing program, two DU graduate student consultants, Kanika Agrawal and Rachel Dunleavy, are presenting findings from that research at the International Writing Centers Conference in San Diego on October 26.

Second, the Writing Center is starting an extensive project researching the impact of its work by surveying graduating seniors and recent DU alumni. Following that phase in the spring of 2013, the project will conduct interviews with selected participants.

Led by Dr. Schonberg and Assistant Director Dr. Juli Parrish, the Writing Center is staffed by several Writing Lecturers and 22 student consultants, each of whom complete a graduate level course in writing center theory, research, and pedagogy. While seven of these consultants are PhD students in English, the remainder represent a range of disciplines, both graduate and undergraduate, including business, international studies, sociology, economics, and religious studies.
The Writing Lunch
Quick Teaching Advice For Busy Profs
In 55 minutes.
With pizza.

There’s still time to catch a couple of 55-minute sessions of practical information—with a simple free lunch. Doug Hesse will be happy to lead any of these workshops for your group. Contact him at dhesse@du.edu.

Our format will be pizza and fruit at noon, followed by a 15-minute presentation of practical advice (accompanied by handouts or resources), then 25 minutes for questions or discussion. All workshops will be held in the Nelson Hall Private Dining Room.

Responding to Writing While Saving Some Weekend

You assign a paper with a heavy heart, fearing that you’ve just simultaneously sentenced yourself to a weekend of grading. But not necessarily. This workshop focuses on responding effectively but efficiently.

Tuesday, October 9, noon – 12:55
Repeated on Friday, October 19, noon – 12:55

Getting Students Beyond Drive-by Quotations and Haphazard Summary

So you’ve made an assignment that requires analyzing or synthesizing sources, but several students are unable to do anything substantial with the readings beyond stringing together summaries or quotations. What do you do? We’ll provide some practical advice for helping students do more than haphazardly cite or share glib opinions.

Wednesday, October 17, noon – 12:55
Repeated on Tuesday, October 30, noon – 12:55

What Students Like Best about—and Learn Most from—Writing Experiences

Our five-year longitudinal research on 60 DU undergraduates yielded interesting findings about writing experiences they found most valuable. For example, “easy” doesn’t necessarily equal “good” in their minds. We’ll share some findings with you.

Tuesday, October 23, noon – 12:55
Repeated on Friday, November 2, noon – 12:55

Multimodal Writing Assignments: Beyond 12-Point Double Spaced Times

Traditional academic papers are the bread and butter of college writing, but they aren’t the only kinds of assignments faculty might make to further teaching and learning goals. This workshop will present some ideas for incorporating visual or other elements in assignments, perhaps in pieces meant to be published digitally.

Wednesday, October 31, noon – 12:55
Repeated on Thursday, Nov. 8, noon – 12:55
What Kind of Reading Should We Teach?

Lance Massey

The world of digital, networked reading and writing and of nearly ubiquitous information, has fundamentally changed our reading practices—and certainly those of our students. Superficiality—skimming, jumping from link to link, having multiple windows open at once, reading 200 tweets instead of a long poem or a short essay—has replaced depth in our everyday reading practices. Even online news articles frequently have “jump” pages, through which readers must click to read beyond the first few paragraphs. And surprisingly few people click through, it turns out.

This fact has generated one of the most interesting controversies in rhetoric and composition: do we continue to teach the old model of deep, close reading, or do we embrace these new practices and explore their potentialities?

Some scholars and many popular writers (see Nicholas Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” The Atlantic, July/August 2008) lament this change. It registers to them as a loss of the ability to think deeply and deliberately. Rutgers professor Richard Miller, for example, now advocates the practice of “reading in slow motion,” in which he and his students read one, and only one, book-length text in a whole semester. They read microscopic chunks at a time, and no one, not even Miller, is allowed to read ahead. He writes: “Can you learn to read without rereading? Can you learn how to think without experiencing thought? ‘Reading in Slow Motion’ is convened with the specific goal making time for students to have the embodied experience of reading” (“Reading in Slow Motion” 2010, online).

It should be noted, of course, that Miller is no luddite, nor does he want us to bury our collective heads in the sand, simply denying the reality of digital literacy. After all, Miller teaches multi-modal composing, his students producing dazzling videos, some of which he shared in a 2010 talk at DU. But “reading in slow motion” begs the questions: is “slow” reading inherently good? Is “thought” only experienced in slow reading?

Many would answer, “no.” Alex Reid critiques the dominant model of reading historically taught in English departments. In “Close Reading, Open Composition” (2009, online), Reid notes that “close reading” is predicated on a “scarcity” of texts (he uses the example of the literary canon) at a time when the numbers and kinds of texts our students encounter have expanded exponentially and when the idea of canonicity itself has been, if not jettisoned entirely, then at least sent to sit in the corner awhile and think about what it’s done. Advocates of new ways of reading enabled/propelled by digital discourse suggest, instead, that we acknowledge the potential for knowledge- and meaning-making that these new practices open up—for gathering, for re-mixing, for mashing-up texts, sounds, and images in creative, surprising new ways. These activities require thought, they all at least potentially make new meaning, and they can all be conducive to learning. Or so the argument goes.

What kind of reading to teach is far from settled, with pedagogies befitting digital literate practices necessarily still emerging, in contrast with those established for decades. It’s clear, however, that we can’t afford to ignore that reading has changed—or rather, that it’s become complicated, another layer of literacy skills needing to be acquired. It may be that we need to teach students when and how to toggle between fast and slow reading—and why.
“The View from a Rear View Mirror”
Kathleen Blake Yancey’s Lecture at DU

Angela Sowa

In an October 12 lecture on campus sponsored by the Writing Program, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Kellogg W. Hunt Professor of English and Distinguished Research Professor at Florida State University, imagined how composition might look in the year 2030. Speaking from this future vantage point, Yancey reflected on changes nascent in 2012 that will grow to be influential in 18 years. Among other topics, Yancey discussed major demographic and cultural shifts, assessment practices, and the role of new media.

Kathleen Blake Yancey is the current editor of College Composition and Communication and is a past president of The NCTE, CCCC, and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. One of her recent articles, “Notes Toward a Theory of Prior Knowledge and its Role in College Composers’ Transfer of Knowledge and Practice,” was co-written with DU Writing Lecturer Kara Taczak.

Yancey began by discussing how early 20th century writing practices were transformed by advent of the screen. Drawing on the work of Lester Faigley and Diana George, Yancey explained that by 2030, compositionists will have fully embraced the transition from page to screen, bringing a fundamental shift away from consumption and toward participation. She also noted the roles of antecedent genres (Charles Bazerman) and document literacy (Deborah Brandt) in our 2030 understanding of everyday writing practices.

New media will continue to transform how writers produce and readers encounter texts. Ascending in importance will be versioning, layering, and circulating. Writers will engage with academic, general, and avant-garde texts through the use of blogs, wikis, social media, emphasizing recursivity and connection across multiple media.

One consequence will be the continued rise but eventual fall of massive open online courses (MOOCs). Compositionists, scholarly institutions, and society at large will realize the significant difference between self-improvement and self-formation, and will understand that the experience of classroom learning goes beyond knowledge acquisition. Hence, by 2030, the MOOC will be a failed fad, an experiment in learning that, we quickly realized, did not fulfill the needs of student composers.

What will meet the needs of student composers, Yancey concludes, are projects that center around five foci: analysis, creation, curation, participation, and circulation. These foci will reflect the values of compositionists and suggest the types of writing that writers will engage. Yancey argues that future composition courses will emphasize meta-cognition through portfolios that highlight the connections between producing and consuming texts.

In her 2004 address to The Conference on College Composition and Communication, Yancey cited “tremors” to describe changes within the field of rhetoric and composition. Her “View from a Rear View Mirror” continues that metaphor by giving us a vision of the possible landscape after such tremors have subsided. Of course, any prediction about the future of rhetoric and composition is a statement of its current values, but Yancey’s breadth of view helps us see our field both as it should be and as it can be.
Six New Writing Faculty

Adding two new lines and replacing four colleagues who moved to other positions, the writing program welcomed six new colleagues this fall: Cydney Alexis, Amber Engelson, Lance Massey, Lauren Picard, Angela Sowa, and Melissa Tedrowe.

Cydney Alexis
PhD, Composition and Rhetoric, University of Wisconsin
JD, University of Wisconsin Law School
MA, English, University of Florida
BA, English, University of Florida

Cydney researches the material practices of writers and writing, focusing on writing environments and tools. At Wisconsin, she was Assistant Director of the Writing Fellows Program and Director of the Rose Writing Workshop.

Amber Engelson
PhD, English, Rhetoric and Composition, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
MA, English Composition, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
BA, English and Comparative Literacy Studies, Occidental College

Amber comes to DU via California Lutheran University, where she was assistant professor of English and directed the writing center. She taught in Indonesia as a U.S. Department of State Fellow, reflecting her interests in English as a second language.

Lance Massey
PhD, English/Writing Studies, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
MA, English Literature, Southwest Missouri State University
BA, Political Science, University of Missouri

Lance previously was assistant professor of English and Rhetoric at Bowling Green State University. With research interests in composition theory and pedagogy, he is co-editor of *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition*.

Lauren Picard
MFA, Writing, Literature and Publishing, Emerson College
BA, Psychology, Syracuse University

In addition to teaching at Emerson, Lauren has worked as a freelance writer and photographer and as a graphic consultant. She has done community literacy work with Americorps and the Claderwood-Snowden Writing Center in Boston.

Angela Sowa
ABD, Texas Christian University
MA, English, University of Texas at Arlington
BA, English, Southwestern Adventist University

Angela is researching online rhetorical practices of women-specific blogging communities, reflecting broader interests in digital communication. She has experience teaching English as a foreign language and was named Graduate Instructor of the Year at TCU.

Melissa Tedrowe
PhD, English, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
MA, English, University of Vermont
BA, English, Smith College

Melissa served a number of years as the Associate Director of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she coordinated the Community Writing Assistance Program and the Greater Madison Writing Project.
In-Depth with Five Faculty

Blake Sanz

In January 2012, Blake Sanz began interviewing writing program faculty about their life and work—but with a twist. He made a list of the 25 artifacts/concepts and prior to each interview asked his subject to choose one artifact and think about how they might consider using it in a class. Items from the list could only be used once. **The List:** The Bible, R. Kelly’s *Trapped in the Closet* Series, Denver Botanic Gardens, Colorado State Capitol, StumbleUpon.com, *Girl Talk*, Obama’s State of the Union address, Tim Tebow, Any Judith Butler essay, Banksy’s graffiti art, DU’s Cookbook Archives, Spotify, NY Times Magazine Fashion Issue, Schadenfreude, Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, Rush Limbaugh, Collection of High School Yearbooks from 1966-2011, Kim Jong Il, *Call of Duty 3: Modern Warfare*, Johnny Cash’s “Hurt” v. the NIN version, Any Essay from Didion’s *The White Album*, Panopticon, Google Earth, Superbowl Commercials, *Denver Post* coverage of Occupy Denver.

“Did you know the city owns its own buffalo herd in Genesee?” she asked. “That’s the park system’s herd. They’ve had them since 1914, continuously.” And then she tells me a little of the buffaloes’ history, their lineage that goes back to a Yellowstone herd.

Such discoveries are one way of re-attuning herself to a city she’d known long before, but in a very different context. Having attended high school in Fort Collins, she’d come to Denver in those days to visit family and friends, and she finds her old memories of that Denver butting up against the new Denver, the one she lives in now. “Well, when I was in high school and even college, Denver was the Tattered Cover (the old one in Cherry Creek), the Cherry Creek biking trail, and then maybe a Mexican restaurant near Evans and Holly (in the suburbs). My experience of it was this very compressed version of the city, separated by endless strip malls and these wide, thruway roads.”

And what does she think of it now? “I really like the neighborhoods here. I’ll say to my sister, ‘Have you been to Park Hill?’ And she doesn’t even know what that is. And it’s just half a mile from where she lives.” Such is the odd position Juli finds herself in: the city’s not a stranger, but she also doesn’t yet feel as home here as a long-time resident. The terrain is still in need of mapping. Hence the parks tour, as a start.

Before coming here, Juli lived and worked in Duluth, at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Denver, she’s found, is a far cry from that tundra. At the bar, she seemed ready to revisit that old haunt. One of the stark realities she remembers is its smallness. “In Duluth, I couldn’t get a beer or a prescription or a bottle of wine or even groceries without running into a student who was working there.” She talked, too, about the strange, wondrous aesthetics of Lake Superior in winter. But, while others often remarked on its sublime quality, Juli had a different impression, one that’s in line with my Southern sensibilities: “If you’re at the lake, some say you have that stark beauty and it...
feeds the soul—whatever. Truth is, the town is a block of ice from October to June.”

And so, even before arriving in Denver, Juli understood what it meant to re-attune, to reset, to find equilibrium. Not long after her brief foray South, Juli had not only finished her dissertation and received her degree, but also landed the tenure-line job at UM-D. It was no small feat, and a concrete sign that her academic career had begun in earnest.

The List

From The List, Juli picked StumbleUpon.com, a social bookmarking website designed to facilitate interaction with the Internet. It presents users with the home pages of sites related to a set of topics chosen by the user. In choosing it, Juli was especially intrigued by how an experience of the site mirrors the way college students encounter a university. She explained: “So, here’s this thing”—StumbleUpon—“that’s thrown at them, and they have to figure out what to do with it. I think that’s what happens in college a lot. You’re confronted with this new thing, and you’ve got to figure out something to say about it.”

She likes the unintended juxtapositions the site creates between websites shown in sequence, and she likes imagining what a student might do with the random assortment of pages that it would show them. “Say you’re a student and you’re confronted with a political cartoon, and then a wiki entry, and then a new YouTube video, and then a photograph. So, what do you do? What do you do with a set of texts like that? How do you find something, a thread that runs through all of them? And then, how does that let you talk about this set of texts? I think that that’s what you have to do in academia—you have this field, and within that field, you’re presented with these texts, and you have to find a way to connect these disparate things.”

Another aspect of the site that’s interesting to her is how it limits the kinds of websites you stumble upon, based on the profile of interests you enter for yourself. “So, I’m choosing to limit what I receive based on what I’m interested in. And I think that [students today] are growing up with that possibility, that they can choose what comes into their view.” And this notion of a self-created filter is at the heart of a potential assignment Juli would create. “If the goal were to talk about that lens, then maybe I could get them to look at their current account, and then set up a ghost account in which they don’t limit their interests. And then, maybe they do 12 stumbles for each account, and then compare those results. That could be interesting. What do you see? Is it different? Is it different in an interesting way? Is the juxtaposition worth talking about? And then of course, and most importantly, would an exercise like this teach them something valuable about writing?”

Though she likes the idea, she says she’d worry a bit that DU students wouldn’t find the exercise academic enough. This gets at a crucial difference she sees between students she’s taught at DU, and students she’s taught elsewhere. Additionally, she worries about that age-old favorite line many teachers hear from students: We’re just reading too much into it. “Which is closely related to my other least favorite student comeback: ‘I don’t really have much to say about that.’”

Currently, Juli’s working on a paper about contingent faculty issues. Along the lines of discussions the DU Writing Program faculty has had lately, she sees a shift in the field toward fewer tenure-line jobs. And with that shift, she argues, should come other changes. “If the profession as a whole is changing, which it is, and tenure is becoming less available, which it is, and jobs like ours are becoming more popular, then shouldn’t we come up with a new nomenclature to talk about that, since our inherited role is at the bottom of this hierarchy? But that shouldn’t be, if it’s truly a new way of organizing academic labor. Or it could be. I’m trying to find ways to talk about that.” And so, she’s soon to give a paper on the rhetoric evident in the forums for this topic on the website for the Chronicle of Higher Education.
Juli’s always been very aware of her surroundings: the land, her jobs, the places she’s lived. It struck me in our conversation how she remembered details about certain moments in her life: a strange encounter on a train with a former professor, a drive across the country with her sister, and this: “I did my phone interview for the DU job with Doug and Eliana at my grandmother’s house in Pittsburgh, and I remember how there were 11 pictures of Jesus on the walls around me as it went on.” For Juli, there’s always been that need for attunement, that ability to achieve it. And with Denver and DU and all of the challenges that have come with them, it’s clear she’s already begun to put that skill to use.

From Student- to Professor-Athlete:
Liz Drogin

9:30 on a Wednesday morning at Kaladi’s Coffee, Liz Drogin sits down with me prior to a meeting about a new publication she’s helping create called Writ Large. Her involvement in that endeavor, which will feature writing and research from DU students, speaks to the kinds of activities she often gets excited about. “I’m a pretty gregarious person and pretty action-oriented,” she says. It’s not that more isolating research pursuits don’t interest her (more later on a project she’s begun), but that projects involving interaction bring her the most joy. She’s more animated by teaching and community engagement than anything else. “My hope is that I can bring some of those elements to this job,” she said.

In addition to Writ Large, Liz is also designing two DU service learning classes. Students in those courses will work with a local nonprofit organization called America Scores Denver, an education program dedicated to promoting good decision-making, discipline, and positive self-expression in local youth by combining activities involving soccer and creative writing.

A sign of her personality: she’d begun looking for that kind of community engagement even before she arrived in Denver. “When I knew I was moving out here,” she says, “I started looking at nonprofit websites. And then I saw this one that involved soccer and literacy. It’s this cool combination of a number of my interests.” And so, on arriving, even before she took the job at DU, she began working with them. Now, it’s become a starting point for a new teaching project.

Since early in her academic career, a passion for teaching has driven her choices. In fact, discovering that passion helped her navigate a grad school trajectory that involved some indecision early on. After finishing her undergrad degree, she went immediately for a Masters in Sociology at Berkeley, where, after one year, she applied to a public policy law program. While she deferred that acceptance for a year, she taught at a high school in San Francisco. “It was a really rewarding experience,” she says. So much so, in fact, that she considered staying with it. “But a lot of what we talked about in class were social issues, and so I thought I should go back and take on the policy program, because then I could enact change on the macro level.”

So, she enrolled in the law and policy program. She enjoyed the courses, but then she signed on as a TA for a healthcare policy class. In that role, her true passion was reiterated. “I found that what I enjoyed most was teaching that quarter. I was trying to imagine my future behind the desk as a policy analyst or a lawyer,
and I just couldn’t do it.” And so she re-enrolled in the sociology program at Berkeley.

Eventually, she and Jason, her husband, moved to North Carolina. There, Liz got a chance to teach in the Sociology Department at Duke. While there, she procured a post-doc as a Thompson Writing Fellow. Then, two years ago, she and Jason moved to Denver, where she began her local nonprofit work and taught at DU part time before landing a lecturer position this past fall.

Through all those moves, there have been two constants for Liz: one has been soccer. She played at Harvard, and since then has continued to play on teams in every place she’s lived since. That includes Denver, where she’s currently in a league. “It’s great,” she says. “Every Thursday night I have a game at 9:30, 10 at night. And I’m so tired, and I’m thinking, ‘Am I really going to go out and do this?’ But then I come home and I feel like me. It’s a way to tap things that have been important to me.”

Sometimes, she still sees things through the eyes of a player, and I ask her about connections between sports and teaching. “I’m fairly intense, but I also hope that I’m encouraging. When I played basketball I was a point guard. In soccer I’m a midfielder, and so I really like to distribute and pass. That’s my favorite part of the game. I hope that, in the classroom, I bring that same sort of vision and focus on collaboration. But I also have high expectations of my students and my teammates, too. Hopefully, that manifests itself in a positive way. But I think sometimes some students aren’t up for that. Teammates have always responded well, but sometimes in the classroom it feels too rigorous.”

Regarding the oft-maligned teacher-as-coach metaphor, Liz has her own take. “I think it’s useful. In one sense, I feel like I’ve learned so much from coaches over the years, and been inspired by them. They’ve set high standards, and some of them have shown a personal interest in me, and so that combination of challenging students but also being invested and at times trying to play along side them by putting yourself on the same level can be really helpful.”

Aside from soccer, the other constant in Liz’s life has been her family. She met Jason in college, and they’ve been together now for fifteen years, married for seven. “It’s been fun. We have a lot of similar interests.” They both play soccer, are both into hiking and camping. And within the last few years, they’ve had two daughters: Sophie, who just turned three, and Elise, who’s now eight months. “It’s interesting, because Sophie is pretty different from me and my husband in the sense that she’s a pretty cautious kid, pretty introverted.” And Liz has watched, too, as Sophie’s adjusted to the role of big sister. “She and [Elise] are just starting to interact more, which is nice. It’s a tough transition for Sophie because she got a lot of attention. She was the first grandchild on both sides, so it’s nice to see them playing a little more.”

With motherhood, perhaps, has come a new perspective on her stance in the classroom. At this point in her career, Liz explains, she sometimes feels caught between the young, energetic teacher she was when she first started, and the older, wiser stereotype of a professor. “It’s just odd. I don’t know how to be because I think I’m still young and cool, and I know I’m not, but I also don’t have the authority of an older woman.” It’s a position she hasn’t quite figured out yet, one that likely sounds familiar to other lecturers in the program.

**The List**

From The List, Liz chose a collection of high school yearbooks from 1966-2011. It stood out to her. “It’s something students could relate to, and I like entering a course with something that everyone feels comfortable with.” She was interested in the opportunities students would be afforded to imagine different ways of presenting themselves. “I was thinking specifically of the blurb that students write” beneath their pictures, she says, though she’d also be interested in comparisons. “For 1133, I was thinking about content analysis, and comparisons across time.
You could do historical comparisons, but within a time period you could have something to talk about, depending on the range of populations in the yearbook. That could be interesting.”

In her own research, Liz is interested in pursuing a writing project involving an exploration of issues around miscarriage and infertility. “I’ve known a lot of friends and acquaintances who have had struggles around childrearing, and so I’m interested in doing some sort of qualitative research project that would be more sociological.” She’s currently trying to decide whether the project would be more academic in nature, or a take on the subject meant for a popular audience.

That she’s thinking both ways is a sign of her action-oriented approach to things—and more broadly, of the divide she often faces in deciding what projects to choose. She wants to research, yes, but she wants to make a broader impact, too. Throughout her life, Liz has often found herself shifting between those two selves, the one that’s firmly associated with academia, and the other that’s equally interested in concerns and ideas outside of it. Life as a student-athlete once demanded that dichotomy of attention, and in the many different kinds of projects Liz has so far taken on, you can see her still walking that line. There’s more than a little bit of soccer’s competitive spirit in her, and yet she also evinces a carefully considered approach to the demands of academic life, too.

Chances are, though, if there’s a competitively charged, interactive way for her to confront an issue, she’s going to approach it that way. Distributing the ball’s the nature of her game, and given how long she’s been at it, you can guess she’ll usually find a way to bring something useful and good to those around her, no matter the project at hand.

A Nomadic Transplant(ER):
Megan Kelly

Maybe it’s because Megan Kelly has lived all over the hemisphere that she seems to feel at ease just about anywhere. For our interview, I met her at a bar off Colfax, and even though she arrived at the end of a long day—having taught classes and attended a two-hour lecture on the Occupy movement—she seemed a light spirit. Still, it would be too simple to say that she’s used to moving. Maybe it’s also that she’s grown accustomed to a certain easy way of looking around, a way of thinking about the places she’s lived. As a child, Megan lived briefly in California, then went to high school in Panama, then later moved to northern Virginia, and then settled in Seattle for a stint in graduate school before moving to Denver for the job at DU. And yet, as she grew up, the one place that most seemed like home (at least for a while) was southern California, where her grandparents lived, where she and her parents would always return to visit.

But at 28, she moved to Seattle for grad school in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Washington. And it was there, she said, that she finally found a place she could identify with. Many of us cling to where we went to high school or college and think of it as the place most central to who we’ve become. But for Megan, it’s her grad school city, Seattle, that she identifies with. “I did a lot of growing up there in some respects. I felt more at home there than other places I’ve lived.”

Compare her take on Seattle, for example, to her high school experience in Panama: “I definitely have fond memories there, but I left when I graduated, and I never went back until I was in my 30s.” And so in Seattle, Megan first got introduced to a set of ideas and people that felt familiar. “I used to say that home was wherever I was, but with Seattle, I really felt connected to the place. I felt a connection to the
people there, and I had a lot of significant life experiences there that I think shaped who I am now.”

Among those experiences was an introduction to urban gardening, still something Megan closely identifies with now, both for how she uses it in the classroom and where she spends time outside of work. At DU, she gets students to confront questions surrounding the organic foods movement. On her own time, she volunteers with a number of projects related to grassroots gardening. For example, she’s a co-leader for Denver Urban Gardens, where she acts as a liaison between the organization and DU students interested in projects related to that field of interest.

Though that curiosity started in Seattle seven years ago, she’s keen to how the organic movement has evolved since then. She’s able to trace that change in the progression of student attitudes toward it. “At first, there was the food justice movement, and thinking about organic, local fair, real food. That was a new concept for students then. It was all about thinking about why that’s important, and learning about these issues. Texts like Supersize Me and Fast Food Nation were fostering student awareness. Back then, the green movement was just beginning to be a part of people’s consciousness.”

Since 2005, when she discovered this issue, things have changed considerably. “Now, I’d say that most [students] are completely aware of the movement. A new focus of my class, then, is on greenwashing.” She explained how some students quickly accept the claims many food companies make about their products. And so, as a teacher, Megan focuses on bringing students to a more critical view of those companies and their ways of advertising.

Concerning her own gardening endeavors, since moving to Denver in 2010, Megan’s noticed how different the process can look from one place to another. “Seattle and Denver are very different in terms of weather. The growing season is a lot different, and there are a lot of issues around water. Moving here has made me very aware of water scarcity.

Watering a vegetable garden here has very different implications here than in Seattle.” For example, in Seattle, she said, you can grow kale year round because it never gets too cold. But in Denver, it’s trickier. “You can’t grow it here,” she starts to say, and then thinks a moment: “But there are ways around that.”

It’s this do-it-yourself spirit that drives Megan these days. In addition to growing her own vegetables, she also makes her own cleaning products, her own cheese and bread. And behind every such endeavor, there’s a well-considered argument that drives her behavior. More than anything, it’s this notion of a carefully considered set of interactions with the world that’s at the heart of how Megan approaches her life and her teaching.

The List

From The List, Megan chose Denver Post coverage of Occupy Denver, and she spoke about how the movement provides interesting gateways into rhetorical discussions of perspective. “My class is focused on how people experience or witness the same thing, and then explain it or understand it in completely opposing ways.” And it’s with respect to this notion that she imagines the Post’s coverage of Occupy would be interesting. It would provide a perspective she could compare to other ways the movement has been framed. “So, for example, in Denver, there was national coverage of how the police were interacting with the occupiers. I’d want to have students look at how the Post covered it, versus how the Denver Occupy website covers it, versus the national media coverage of that event. And then, there were live streams of the event, too.” She sees potential here for students to become aware of how those various lenses affect our perceptions of what really happened, and how we might think about the event’s implications.

I asked her if there were any galvanizing images from Occupy Denver that she’d be
interested to have students work with. That led us to a discussion of larger memes associated with Occupy. We discussed the Casually-Pepper-Spray-Everything-Cop meme. Those sorts of things, Megan said, raise interesting questions for students to contemplate: “I’d be interested to have them wonder what new understanding we might get of the original [Davis pepper spray] experience or not. And whether or how [the meme] distorts the original experience. Those kinds of things would be interesting to talk about.”

Megan’s current research project is her dissertation, which has to do with academic libraries and their ways of interacting with composition programs. Given the vast changes in how libraries function now as a result of sweeping technological changes in the past 30 years, she’s interested in tracing a history of those interactions.

Her curiosity for this work grew in part out of a love for architecture. She remembers when the Seattle public library was being designed in 2004, when questions were being asked about how the space would be constructed, given that architects now had to consider ways that new technologies might change the demands on a library’s use of space.

Megan sees changes in libraries all around: in Seattle, not only did she witness the public library’s design and construction, but she has also arrived in Denver at a time when DU’s library is being renovated. In addition, there’s variation not just in how libraries get literally constructed, but in how composition programs choose to interact with them. As an example, she pointed to a friend of hers who teaches at George Washington. “They’re assigned a library liaison like we are [at DU], except that they work much more closely, to the point where they’re presenting at conferences together. We typically have one class with our liaisons here to talk about the library. For them, their role is more integrated.” And so, she’s interested in exploring that level of integration at some institutions, versus schools where those interactions are more limited.

For now, though, her focus is on teaching—hence the 10-hour day this Tuesday. When the interview’s done, I turn off the recorder, and we start talking about the bar and our neighborhoods, the things we like about them and the things we don’t. We order more beer. We talk some more. Two hours later, we get up to leave, and only then do I realize exactly how long a day Megan has had, but only because I’d asked. The transition from interview to hanging out happened without my even knowing it. She gave no sense of wanting to head home, even though it was now near midnight on a weeknight. Typical of Megan, this would mark just another move from one place of being to another.

Running while Singing
Simon & Garfunkel: An Ex-Corporate Worker: Kara Taczak

In a prior life, Kara Taczak worked for Georgia-Pacific. She had a cubicle in their downtown Atlanta office that she shared with a few older women. Most days, she’d crunch numbers having to do with something called non-compliance. The way she tells this story, it’s clear there’s no need to ask her how she felt about it. “It was a no brainer job. You put stuff into a computer, you generate an Excel spreadsheet, and it generates the numbers. I got bored pretty quickly.” Unsurprisingly, she didn’t stay long. For someone with Kara’s critical mind, the numbers-crunching biz wasn’t going to cut it. “I didn’t want to sit in a pod and listen to the women complain.”

She took that job just after she’d sped through a Masters degree, in a time when she wasn’t quite ready to dive into a PhD program just yet. If anything, the experience gave her a gauge against which she could mark her later march through academia with a steady dose of reality to keep her grounded.
The corporate route wasn’t the only fork in the road for Kara. There was also an early dalliance with creative writing as an undergrad in Ohio. “Luckily for the world,” she says, “that didn’t happen. I really wanted to be a rhyming poet. And I mean, rhyming in that I wanted to rhyme works like ‘diva’ with ‘feevah.’”

But more than a fear of being known as DJ Kara the Poet, it was a dissociation with the trends of the creative writers she knew that led her into another track. “I tended to resist my fellow creative writers because I felt like they represented a specific type of person, and a very specific stereotype, and I didn’t want to fulfill that stereotype. And so I did my best to resist it and reject it.”

In the end, Kara went on to get a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition from Florida State, where she studied under Kathy Yancey, and finished a dissertation on reflection and transfer in the first-year writing classroom. Her job here at DU comes right on the heels of finishing that degree.

The List

Kara chose Any Essay from Joan Didion’s White Album, and we spoke for a while about it as a possible tool in the classroom. “The book as a whole is a really good insight into who she is, both as a person and as a writer. I read her as an undergrad in a nonfiction class, and I wanted to be just like her.” Aside from that admiration for Didion as a person, Kara sees much to admire in her writing, too. “She’s such a great storyteller. She weaves in her own ideologies without you realizing she’s doing it.”

She singled out the title essay as one that seemed especially ripe for use in the classroom. She sees “White Album” as most emblematic of Didion’s style, and one that might be ripe for a kind of imitation assignment in which students attempt to mimic that style in their own autobiographical narrative situating a self inside a literate society. She’s quick to point that she wouldn’t be after just a literacy narrative: “So, not a literary journey, because those all get to be the same—like, ‘My mom read to me as a five year old’—but really getting to heart of, ‘Okay, you’re a literate person in this society. What does this mean? And can you tell that to me in a narrative form instead of an essay?’”

In describing what she’d hope they’d get from the assignment, Kara considered not only the insight they might have about themselves as literate people, but also something about the literal place they most connect to. Didion’s White Album is as much a manifesto on California as it is about her life and her subjects, and Kara would like to see her students contemplate their own hometowns or home states in the same way.

This lead to a conversation about her own connections to home. I asked her specifically about Ohio, where she grew up, and she resisted the notion of that place as home. “I don’t ever want to live in Ohio again,” she said bluntly, laughing. When pushed, she mentioned how she felt that home was a relative term. “I don’t look at Ohio as home, but I don’t think of any other place that I’ve lived as home either. I’ve lived in Atlanta twice and I really like the area, but I don’t think of it that way. I think home is wherever I am at the time, and if I’m surrounded by friends and family that I love and respect, and they do the same back, then that place is home.”

To elaborate, she recounted a recent trip: “My brother and I drove to Florida for Christmas to visit my mom and dad. Driving there, we said, ‘We’re going home to Tallahassee. But driving back we were also saying that we were ‘coming home.’ So, I don’t know. Ask me in 10 years. Right now, it’s not like that for me.”

Kara has tried to make Denver feel like home in that relative way by building communities around the interests she’s had in other places. As a swimmer in college, she’s always identified as an athlete. And these days, she’s found herself in search of good running trails and running partners. And finding a running partner, she said, isn’t as easy as you
might think. Some people—like Kara—talk while they run, and others don’t. Some enjoy listening, some don’t.

“I’m definitely a chatter when I run,” she explained. “Sometimes, in high school, I’d sing Simon & Garfunkel to my runners partners. My best friend and I used to run in Ohio, and it was a perfect union. She’s a non-talker, so she’d just start the run by saying, ‘Kara, I’m just going to listen, and you just talk to me.’ She liked that. She liked me to just chat away and help her be distracted.”

Aside from running friends, she’s also found a sense of community through the Denver Church of Christ. She enjoys the camaraderie there among a relatively younger group of churchgoers, and has made a number of friends in her new hometown through it.

We talk then about taboos around religion in academia, and I mention a former teacher in the DU Writing Program who identified as Christian, and who designed a class in which students explored the rhetoric of religious versus scientific arguments about creation. I’m curious to know whether, in the same way that those teachers with an interest in, say, the Coalition for the Homeless might incorporate that interest into their classroom, does Kara ever imagine incorporating some intellectual notion of Christianity into her classes? “For myself, I keep religion separate from teaching. I think I’d be lying to say it doesn’t influence who I am as a teacher. Still, I don’t seek out opportunities to discuss it. But then, I wouldn’t do that with running, or any other aspect of my identity, either. I try use examples of things I hope are relevant to them at the moment. So maybe, the Super Bowl. That’s been a topic of conversation recently.”

Though a number of different identities converge in Kara, it’s her identity as a teacher that most defines her. She laughed as she told me how sometimes, when she goes out with her brother here in Denver, he has to call a time out on conversations about teaching. “I just always really wanted to be a professor. I wanted to know how to teach, and teach well,” she explained. Spend an afternoon with Kara, and you’ll likely see that more than running, more than her career as a swimmer, more than her prior incarnation as a corporate worker for Georgia-Pacific, it’s teaching that drives her thinking.

Remember the Hippopotamus: A Former Vegas Resident:
Eric Leake

The past few years, Eric Leake and his friends have started a tradition: they travel to the hometown of a Superbowl team and watch the game at a local bar. It’s a small window onto Eric’s way of having fun, and an unlikely example of how his area of interest—the rhetoric of empathy—sometimes gets manifest outside the office. In New Orleans? Root for the Saints. In Green Bay? Root for the Packers. Aside from this, and aside being an excuse to get together, it’s created a more exciting way of watching the game than in a betting town like his home, Las Vegas (no word yet on if he’s headed to New York or Boston this weekend).

And so, yes: he’s from Las Vegas. And yes, he knows that some might think this is curious. But for Eric, it just means he’s got something to talk about. “I like Vegas. I like talking about it culturally and aesthetically and all of that, but I don’t want to be known as The Vegas Guy. I don’t want people to associate me with it because I don’t feel representative of the city, and I don’t want the city to be representative of me. But in the long run, I’m glad to be from a place that has some sort of cultural currency because it does make it easy to talk to people.”

And for those occasions, he’s got a pocketful of insights. When asked about higher education in Vegas, he says that “it’s a town where someone can come out of high school and
have no college education and be making $80,000 a year as a food server or a valet or something. So the view that having an education allows some sort of material prosperity—which is true in aggregate—doesn’t hold up there. For people there to pursue a degree, it’s not just because they want a way to make money.” And when pressed on the essence of the place, he calls on the memory of an old professor’s opinion. “He argued for it in the sense of directness. Like, a lot of things in life are a gamble, but at least in Vegas, the odds are posted and you know what the rules are.” He’s not sure he buys that argument, but he likes the metaphor.

Still, it makes sense that he wouldn’t want his identity constricted that way. After all, there’s a good bit more than Vegas that’s shaped his life. Through a Peace Corps stint in the Republic of Georgia, a series of jobs as a journalist for newspapers in three states, and a Rhet-Comp tour of academia at UNLV and the University of Louisville, Eric’s found himself in a number of circumstances that go well beyond his early days of working poolside at a casino.

For our interview, I met him at City O City, a café in Capitol Hill he’s found since arriving in Denver last summer. We sat down at the bar for happy hour and took some time to catch up. I hadn’t seen him since October. Since then, the number of months he’s lived here has doubled, and I’m interested to hear how he’s come to think of his new home in that time.

“I’ve been really happy with Denver. It’s the biggest city I’ve ever lived in. And coming from Vegas, which isn’t known for its strong community institutions, I’ve been pleased with that. So, the Botanic Gardens, the museums, the movie culture here. That’s been really enjoyable and impressive.” He’s also looking to involve himself in the kinds of communities he’d become a part of in other places. “In Louisville, I spent time volunteering with the refugee community and teaching English. I haven’t done that here yet, but I’d like to. Louisville also had a group called Kentuckians for the Commonwealth”—a local grassroots political action campaign—“so I’d like to get involved with that sort of organization, and I know they have things like that here, too.” Plus, he’s found one of my favorite Denver events: the Museum of Contemporary Art’s Mixed Taste Lectures, in which experts lecture back-to-back on disparate topics. “I hope I can check that out soon,” he says. “This coming week, the topics are Nietzsche and puppies.”

The List

I brought up The List and asked if he’s curious about what’ll be said about of any of the artifacts he didn’t choose. Immediately, he mentioned the Bible—in particular, the Book of Job. Having just experienced a death in my family and given that book’s explanation for suffering, I told him I’d recently re-read it. We re-hashed the excerpt where God tells Job he’s so tiny that he can’t understand suffering. “I feel like that’s the only way God could answer that, you know?” he says.

And then he offers a take on Job I’d never thought of, one that’s emblematic of Eric’s insight and humor, his curiosity. He tells me about how G.K. Chesterton saw it.

“Chesterton’s argument,” Eric recalls, “was that God’s questions to Job weren’t just like, ‘You can’t comprehend me,’ but also like, ‘You think you’ve got it bad? I screwed up everything. Look at the hippopotamus. This creature is crazy. Try to explain that to me.’ Or, ‘Look at the crocodile: no explanation. That’s just how the world is.’ I mean, I don’t know if I agree with that interpretation, but I do find it kind of fun. Like, God just denying his responsibility altogether: ‘Look, I just put things in motion. I don’t know what happens after that.’ Because, the hippo does have it pretty bad, you know? He can’t walk very well, he’s kind of ornery….”

We turned, then, to his choice: schadenfreude—taking pleasure at another’s pain. His interest in that concept makes sense, given his prior work with empathy. “As soon as I started thinking about it, I was like, ‘Oh, this is why that’s interesting.’” In particular, he’s attracted to how it focuses on a sociality of
emotions. “I’d be interested in creating an assignment that allows students to embrace those sorts of contradictions and explore subject positions—and even attempt to write within different subject positions.”

He provided the example of a YouTube video of Bill Gates getting hit in the face with a pie. “If I were to use that in a classroom,” Eric says, “I’d have students look at the comments, too. Some people are like, ‘Well, he gives a lot to charity—this is terrible they did that to him.’ Others are like, ‘He’s got a lot of money, he’s kind of a megalomaniac, he deserves it. Ha, ha, that’s really funny.’ It’s cool to see how it’s not just about how [schadenfreude] happens, but to see the social positions of the observer and the subject. And then, how that’s re-interpreted.” In a related exercise he outlined, students would imagine themselves first as someone getting pleasure out of someone else’s pain, and then as the one whose pain gives others pleasure. Then, they’d reflect on what would guide their feelings in those positions. “I find that face-to-face juxtaposition of emotions to be really interesting,” he says.

This sort of thinking coincides with his ongoing dissertation on empathy. Down the line, he’s also interested in other studies of affect and emotion, including nostalgia. “So, how is [nostalgia] connected to place—not a place that exists anymore, but an idea of a place.” I think, then, of You Can’t Go Home Again, and it’s easy to see how Eric’s interest in nostalgia grows out of his work with empathy. As he puts it, “If I want to feel what it’s like to be in your shoes, I first have to take you out of them.”

Along those lines, we discuss stories—like Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind and Anthony Doerr’s Memory Wall—in which notions of memory and longing for home are central. It’s easy to see I’ve found a subject he’s passionate about. “I find it an interesting affective experience to be longing for some place that not only doesn’t exist, but can only exist as an abstraction because you can’t go back to whatever that nostalgic place is. I find it both intellectually fun and emotionally resonant.”

He tells me, then, about a radio program in which scientists were asked about memory. “This researcher mentioned how every time you remember something, you’re only remembering the prior remembrance of that event. It’s a Xerox effect. So, then, the highest fidelity memory you could have is the one you’ve never remembered. And every time you go back to the memory, you lose some of the fidelity. You re-make the memory every time you remember it, which is odd. It’s not how people think of memory, but it is fascinating.”

By now, I’ve told the story of Eric’s hippopotamus line at least five times. As I began writing this profile, I knew I’d use that as a window onto his personality. And look back: I have. Even now, I’m remembering the moment and laughing. But next, I play back the digital recording of the interview. I notice I interrupt him at the moment he’s making the joke. He never says anything about a hippo being ornery. Already, I’ve remade that memory (because it fits my writing; because it suits my sense of him). Ahem. Well. And so, from the distance of a profile writer empathizing with his subject reading about this, I imagine Eric nodding his head in understanding—and maybe, too, laughing at my mistake.
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