Carnegie Mellon Writers Go Hollywood

Javier Grillo-Marxuach

Writing for film was his only goal in life, but Javier Grillo-Marxuach found his calling in television. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, culturally and geographically a world away from Hollywood, Grillo-Marxuach says that when he saw Star Wars as a child, two things happened to him. "One, I looked up at the screen and said 'I want to do that,' and two, the film had such an optimistic and exuberant quality of wish fulfillment that it made me feel that anything was possible." Grillo-Marxuach spent his childhood writing stories and arrived at Carnegie Mellon with an intense determination to do as much writing, and get as much feedback, as he could.

Although he left Carnegie Mellon and the graduate screen-writing program at USC with a strong bias toward writing for film, he was offered a position as a TV executive in NBC's Primetime series department. "It didn't take long for me to realize that television is the most writer-driven branch of the entertainment industry," Grillo-Marxuach said. "I left NBC after two years with the goal of forging a career in television, and have been writing professionally ever since."

An Interview with Laura Harkcom & Chris Leone

When you were in school, was writing for television/film in your career plans?

CHRIS: No. At the time, I thought I'd be a novelist/world traveler, or something. But actually, I hate the idea of planning my career. It leaves me cold, and it's pointless anyway, especially in the movie business. You should have a goal, sure, but you can only plan so far. Will you sell your script, or not? Will your script get greenlit, or die? Will your movie succeed or fail? In six months you could be buying a new house or groveling on the unemployment line. Kind of hard to plan beyond that.

And that's what I LIKE about it. I've had regular jobs, and I like this better. My accountant said once it's like martial arts—you just have to be in the moment and react. I just about died laughing, it was the perfect description.

LAURA: According to my parents, I announced when I was 5 years old that I wanted to write for television when I grew up. There were other career paths I flirted with, such as a desire to be a waitress at Long John Silvers (an unlimited supply of fish and chips seemed like a good idea at age 8), but I always came back to writing.

I'm somewhat of a planner, so before I even started freshman year, I pretty much had the entire four years of coursework mapped out. But it wasn't until taking Jane Bernstein's screenwriting workshop...
Message from the Director,
Jim Daniels

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Carnegie Mellon Creative Writing Newsletter. The past year was filled with new, exciting activities in our program. With the establishment of the Gladys Schmitt Student Enhancement Fund, we were able to send four students to the Associated Writing Programs Conference in New Orleans. This year, since the conference was held in Baltimore and students were able to drive, we were able to send a dozen students. I hope alumni will consider contributing to this important fund.

We are continuing to reach out to the Pittsburgh community through our sponsorship of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Writing Awards for Carnegie Mellon students and Pittsburgh-area high school students, and the Power of the Pen, a day-long series of workshops that brings over five hundred Pittsburgh Public School students to campus. The winning entries for the King Awards are posted on our website, and I encourage you to read them.

The Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Center has established itself as the center of our activities, hosting the student reading series, and the Visiting Writers Series receptions, in addition to being used every day as a writing space for our students. The Visiting Writers Series and the Adamson Awards continue to bring in nationally known writers to read and speak with our students. Cornelius Eady, a pioneer of the Cave Canem African American Poetry Retreat, was the Adamson speaker this past year.

We are interested in building up our library of alumni publications, so please notify us about any recent or forthcoming publications. We would also appreciate any donations of journals and books that include your writing. Visiting alumni have been surprised to find their honors thesis projects included in our library. Current students have found them to be quite useful (and inspiring) as they plan their own projects. In addition, they also benefit from alumni contacts, so please continue to keep us updated on your addresses, your careers, etc. And, as always, please stop by and visit us, and the Center, Baker Hall 260, on your next visit to campus.

Jim Daniels

Special Thanks

The Creative Writing Program would like to thank the following individuals for their donations to the Gladys Schmitt Student Enhancement Fund. Please send your checks payable to Carnegie Mellon University to Jim Daniels / English Department / Carnegie Mellon University / Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

Stephen Catanzarite
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Jim Perry
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Carolyn Toth
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Timothy Williams
Visiting Writers Series features Major Jackson

"That Modigliani and Stevie Wonder appear in the same poem, that Shakespeare’s Caliban is compared to a block party D.J. elsewhere, these are but a few examples of the diverse sources he employs," creative writing professor Terrance Hayes says of poet Major Jackson. "He represents a new African American poetry—a poetry that announces itself as ‘black’ not merely by way of its subject matter, but by way of its limitless integration of American idioms."

The Carnegie Mellon community was treated to Jackson’s poems on November 6, 2002, when he read from his work and spoke with creative writing students gathered in the Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Center.

Jackson, winner of the 2000 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and faculty member at the University of Vermont, took a circuitous route to poetry. He studied accounting at Temple University, where he was mentored creatively by Sonia Sanchez. Having worked as literary arts curator for the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia after graduating, Jackson says that experience "normalized the idea of being an artist, that one could make a living in this way. I decided to seriously start writing, knowing that I had some desire to create."

In the MFA program at the University of Oregon, as well as in the Dark Room Collective and Cave Canem, Jackson found a sense of community which he cherishes. "Every young writer needs a community, an audience to bear witness to where you focus your gaze."

Programs like Carnegie Mellon foster this spirit and provide other benefits as well. One of those benefits is a growing intimacy with language. "Something happens when you study language and you are forced to engage in its use. There’s something that carries over that helps you better understand the whole person—the journey of the human—what we record in the humanities," said Jackson.

Hayes says he was first introduced to Jackson as the author of the liner notes for a CD by the hip hop group The Roots. "It was the first time I read something that placed hip hop in a critical/cultural context. I didn’t know who Major Jackson was, but his words rang true, they spoke to me as both a listener of hip hop and as a member of the new school of young black thinkers." Music has a certain primacy in Jackson’s poems, where jazz, urban music and the club scene are recurrent motifs. It is also crucially important to the genesis of his work.

"The function of poetry in the epic era was to praise heroes, and for me the hero is the artist. In the last fifty years, poetry has taken up the project of who we find heroic: what are visual artists? what are musicians? I’m continuing this project; you see it in my masters, my mentors, Sonia Sanchez or Amiri Baraka writing about John Coltrane. I think music is the sister art to poetry: their tools are my tools, their concerns are my concerns, and I’m very conscious of that," Jackson says.

Jackson sees making poems and teaching creative writing as an affirmative process, both for himself and for his students. "In writing and in teaching, one of the things we don’t talk about it that there are discoveries made, about one’s life or technique or language that quietly give us some joy. These discoveries feed the soul in some way."

Major Jackson’s first book, Leaving Saturn, was published by the University of Georgia Press. It was awarded the 2000 Cave Canem Poetry Prize and was selected as a finalist for the 2002 National Book Critics Circle Award.
Letterpress is labor of love for students

In the early days of Carnegie Tech, student printers assembled pages of text by painstakingly selecting every letter of every word and determining each space between letters, words, sentences, and lines. The typesetter tied together heavy blocks of type and aligned the bundles in a manual machine called a letterpress. Next, the typesetter smeared the letters (which were upside and backward to him) with a lead-based ink the letters. Any error could require realignment of the entire document and reprinting.

Jim Daniels, professor of English and creative writing, is bringing this technology of 100 years ago into his Advanced Poetry Workshop. He believes that the meticulous process of bookmaking encourages thoughtfulness and intimacy with one’s work and fosters community feeling in the class. His students experienced the art of bookmaking by using the letterpress to create a class chapbook of poetry.

Daniels explains that as most people write on computers, the editing and revising process can be incomplete because the piece looks finished immediately. The poem never becomes cluttered with typeovers or cross-outs. The letterpress makes the revising process into messy physical labor.

“The letterpress project forces every letter to earn its place in the poem,” said Daniels. “As you align the poem letter by letter, you have a lot of time to think about it.”

Senior Creative Writing major Stephanie Bodnar agreed, “After working so intimately with one particular poem, I’ve realized that I’m constantly editing. I keep having an irresistible desire to change certain words or lines, and the process has been a reminder that, for me, poetry is a work in progress. It perfects itself with time.”

Bodnar and her classmates spent hours in the letterpress room in the basement of Margaret Morrison Hall perfecting and reshaping their poems and designs. Bodnar said that her poem, a little less than one page in length with stanzas that are about half a page in width, took more than six hours the first day of typesetting without even finishing it.

Senior Creative Writing major Mike Jehn admitted that his first typesetting session was a bit frustrating, “but ultimately it was a pretty therapeutic and stress-relieving activity. I was chugging along at a slow but comfortable pace.”

The process imposes a process of critical selection on the students. They must decide which poem is their personal best and why. Because every student will receive two copies of the class chapbook, Daniels feels that the students experience a positive peer pressure to thoughtfully select one’s best poem and create its best design.

Daniels and his students decide every detail of the class chapbook, including the typefaces of the poems, the type of papers the poems and covers are printed on, and the type of string used to sew the bindings. Every chapbook will be individually crafted by students’ hands.

Jehn feels that just the idea of a class chapbook is already rewarding. “I’ll have a presentable, high-quality product to show for my work. The book will be a keepsake, something to remember the experience and my classmates by.”

This year is Daniels’ third time assigning this project.
AWP conference offers rich experience

The Associated Writing Programs (AWP) Conference gave us, as undergraduate students, the opportunity to experience a professional side of writing that we aren't privy to everyday. We were able to meet and speak with writers that we had known only as heroes on our bookshelves, listen to panel discussions about writing, hear readings of all sorts, meet publishers, and discover new journals, and these are just a few of the myriad activities in which we participated. Since our return from Baltimore to Pittsburgh, here are snippets of discussion that can be heard in the Gladys Schmitt Creative Writing Center:

"At the Urban Music Reading Jan Beatty, Crystal Williams, Tim Siebles, and Sean Thomas Dougherty gave such strong readings, it really opened my eyes to what's going on in the poetry world." —Mike Jahn

"I never thought I'd get to see C.K. Williams or Dave Smith read, but when I sat down to hear both of them together, it felt like the height of my young career." —Patrick Misiti

"Keith Banner completely blew the rest of his panel away with his short story, 'The Marriage of Tom and Tom.'" —Connie Amoroso

"I got many new subscriptions to literary journals, including The Black Warrior Review, Westbranch, and Pleiades. I know that reading all the new fiction will inspire me to write more." —Sean Mintus

“I was so impressed by the Pittsburgh Poet’s Reading. As a native to Pittsburgh, it made me proud.” —Mike Scotto

"Maureen Seaton’s panel on pop culture opened my eyes to the world of editing and publishing.” —Meagan Ciesla

"The Carnegie Mellon Series in Short Fiction reading was great. I can’t wait to pick up Jennifer Bannan’s book, Inventing Victor, which series editor Sharon Dilworth tells me is not only fantastic but also forthcoming.” —Sarah Smith

"I couldn’t believe that I got close enough to E.L. Doctorow to actually take his picture. I’ll never forget what it felt like to be in his presence.” —Stephanie Bodnar

"Hearing the tribute to Lucile Clifton made my heart ache—it was so beautiful and sincere.” —Emily M. Green

By Emily Green and Sarah Smith

Readings highlight student talent
After busy days of classes and workshops, Creative Writing students like Senior Connie Amoroso gather monthly to fill the Gladys Schmitt Writing Center to capacity. Any nervousness on the part of fiction writers and poets is balanced by the enthusiastic support of their classmates.
A writer's life (in 748 words and 28 years)

By Shannon Gibney

When I graduated CMU in 1997, people kept on asking me what I was going to do with my degree. Actually, I had two degrees—one in Creative Writing and the other in Spanish, but I somehow sensed that pointing this out to my interrogators would not have the effect I was looking for.

I guess I really had no business being surprised that people would view a degree in the arts so skeptically; by the end of my four years at CMU I had become a skillful speaker on the merits and incredible difficulties of writing (the legions of computer science and ChemE majors who engaged me in 2:30-in-the-morning debates during SPIRIT buggy practices forced me to do so).

I never had any illusions that a school in which it was normal to see cloaked 18-year-old white boys trying to hit each other with sorts medieval looking sticks in any way resembled "the real world." (This was later described to me as "creative anachronism" by a friend, but I will always remember it as "kids beating on each other."

I had never been at a place so intense, so intellectually vibrant, so wacky. I was sure that the world outside the small campus would be much more open to a girl who didn't have her career plan all mapped out but knew that the one thing she wanted
to do—in almost any capacity, in almost any setting—was write.

Of course, the world wasn't, but at least my time at CMU had schooled me on how to deal with the almost religious devotion to pragmatism I encountered everywhere: just get on with it. If I what I wanted to do was write, I would just have to write, I realized.

During the year I spent in West Africa, directly following my graduation, I would write on my laptop for an hour every night, during the brief bouts of power the government meted out to various neighborhoods in order to handle an energy crisis. The following year, when I taught Spanish to young children at Shadyside Academy in Pittsburgh, I was so busy preparing for lessons and recovering from the onslaught of seven-year-old energy that I only wrote occasionally on the weekends. Close friends and family knew that I was still writing, but it became something more insular, less a part of my public life. Therefore, people quit asking me about writing, what I was going to do with it, how I was going to support myself with it. Then I entered grad school. I chose the MFA program at Indiana because they had a three-year program, which featured a third-year entirely devoted to the Master's thesis. During those years, I wrote many bad stories and a few good ones, got into shouting matches with my peers about the relationship between art and race, learned how to teach Creative Writing, and for the first time began to really take myself seriously as a writer. I also managed to complete a draft of a novel, which I continue to revise right now.

Six months ago I moved to Minneapolis, where I somehow snagged a job as associate editor of the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder, a community-oriented Black newspaper. Though my colleagues and I often feel like the WB should seriously consider using some of our newsroom drama as story material for a Black newspaper sitcom, overall I feel incredibly lucky to have this position. I get to interact with my community, meet fascinating people from all walks of life, develop creative projects, manage people and, most importantly, I get to write everyday. Ha! I can't believe it—someone's actually paying me to write. It seems incredible, when I look back six years ago (already...), that when all those people who were asking, "What are you going to do with a degree in creative writing?" I could have simply said, "I'm going to write."
From CMU to MTV: Alumnus Paul Smith shares his experiences as a television writer

A “brain full of random crap” and a degree from CMU will get you farther than you might think. That’s what CMU alum Paul Smith had to say when he lectured as part of the H&SS career forum. Smith has made a name for himself working with big names like MTV, Nickelodeon, Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?, Comedy Central, Disney, and National Geographic.

At Carnegie Mellon, Smith majored in Professional and Creative Writing, but wasn’t afraid to take some electives that didn’t pertain to his major — like acting and dance for non-majors. Smith never felt like a writer.

After graduating in 1982, Smith left for New York and took jobs as a messenger, a phone solicitor, and the editor of an electrical engineering magazine. With all of the dry day jobs, he needed a creative outlet, so he performed in off-Broadway productions and played in bands. Other jobs followed, like proofreading at a typesetting company, but for the most part he always performed on the side.

In 1988, Smith talked to a friend writing for the MTV game show Remote Control. His friend was leaving the show and mentioned that it might be something which Smith would be interested in. Smith watched a couple of episodes, wrote some sample questions for the game, and the next thing he knew, Colin Quinn and Adam Sandler, both virtually unknown at the time, were using his jokes. He was paid approximately the same wage he’d gotten as a proofreader, but the job writing was much more entertaining.

Smith explained that “every TV job is a freelance job,” so it’s important to always be looking for the next one. He was with Remote Control for about nine months and enjoyed it so much he looked for another job in cable. He found it at another comedy game show, this one on Comedy Central called Crash. After nine months there, he spent another season at MTV on Turn It Up, where he landed the head writer spot. The show won a Cable Ace award, and, finally, nine years after graduating, Smith felt like he really had a career.

In ’91, he wrote for Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?. He says he didn’t know much about geography, but he knew how to write comedy for a game show. Later, he wrote for National Geographic’s Really Wild Animals, Disney’s The New Mickey Mouse Club, and Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego?.

With so many writing credits under his belt, the next step was to produce. He accepted a job in MTV’s editorial department. This job entailed writing for any event that didn’t have its own staff, like Spring Break and MTV’s Video Music Awards. Working at MTV, a property of Viacom, gave him connections to other Viacom holdings like Nickelodeon. Through connections with Nickelodeon’s creative director, he got a job at Nick as director of musical content and director of on-air promotions.

One of the most interesting aspects of dealing with on-air promotions is producing the shorts. Smith had had the opportunity to produce Spongebob and Patrick introducing the next show on the “Nick Toons Summer Splash.” Says Smith, “It’s fun to mess around with other people’s characters.”

Although he enjoys producing, a few short weeks ago he resumed writing for a new Nick project, The Backyardigans. The show is 3D animation, geared toward preschoolers and will hit Nick Jr. sometime in 2004.

-Caleb Stright, Tartan staffwriter
Alum's vision fosters creativity among youth in Pittsburgh

From dragon boats to community gardens, from Attack Theatre to the Onyx Alliance, Cathy Lewis' Sprout Fund is enhancing Pittsburgh's cultural life one project at a time. Lewis founded Sprout in 2001 to provide opportunities and seed money for young people to create and promote low threshold, high impact community initiatives. What sets Sprout apart from other funding organizations is its unique vision.

"Sprout's vision is to create a cultural and visual landscape that's thriving and progressive and dynamic to young people," Lewis said. "We also hope to help young people create innovative projects in their communities. There's a change that comes over time by engaging people on the grassroots level to become leaders in their own communities."

Sprout engages and empowers young people, age 18 to 40, who live in the Pittsburgh region. Over the last decade, Southwest Pennsylvania has lost 16 percent of its population between the ages of 20 and 34, a vital segment of the population that sets trends, takes action and influences the perceptions of a much larger audience. Lewis' desire is to create the kinds of communities that young people want to be a part of, and to attract and retain young talent in the Pittsburgh area. "Ultimately, we want to change the perceptions people have about this community through the projects we support," she said.

One of the differences between Sprout and a traditional foundation is that Sprout's projects are decided by advisory board members that are part of the same demographic they serve—young people making decisions to support projects serving young people. Even more unusual is that the advisory board makes awards each month, eliminating the lag time in traditional foundation awards. That quick turnaround allows young leaders to sustain their enthusiasm for innovative projects. "Sprout funds every month, not to compete with the foundation community but to complement their efforts. A lot of projects just need a bit of support to get started," Lewis said. Among those projects are:

The Skinny Building. One of the first projects funded by Sprout, the Skinny Building project is the vision of the grassroots advocacy group Ground Zero. The upper two floors of this unique downtown structure—measuring five feet wide by sixty feet long, with 24 windows—sat idle for some time. Ground Zero turned the Skinny Building into public art exhibit space, awakening a building and providing a place for artists to promote their work.

3 Rivers on 2 Wheels. This original touring guide encourages and advises visitors and residents to explore the city by bicycle. The guide details ten tours that meander through more than twenty Pittsburgh neighborhoods, highlighting the city's history and architecture. Award-winning black and white photographs and route maps are included in the guide.

Black Forum Exhibition. This self-propelled artist collective and performance group assembled to produce original works of art and music for the communities of Garfield, Friendship, East Liberty and points east. The long-term goal is to evolve the Black Forum Exhibition from small, loosely planned events into a full-scale music, theater, and visual arts company based in Garfield/East Liberty that focuses on artistic collaboration, cultural diversity and community engagement.

The Sprout Fund is also working with CMU to help fund the Gladys Schmitt National Novel Contest. Two undergraduate Carnegie Mellon Creative Writing students are working with the University press on this first annual novel contest. Through a national competition directed at emerging, young writers, one manuscript will be selected and published through the Carnegie Mellon Press.

"Cathy Lewis is doing wonderful things for the city of Pittsburgh's art and social scene," says Sharon Dilworth. "She's got a terrific vision for the Sprout Fund and Carnegie Mellon University Press is pleased to have received a grant from this exciting new venture. It's great to be part of such an engaging group of Pittsburghers. We're looking forward to displaying the Press' work on June 7th at Hothouse in Lawrenceville. It's a showcase for the artists and groups who have been helped by Sprout."

For more information visit www.sproutfund.org.
Masters wins major national award
American Academy of Arts & Letters Award for Literature

Hilary Masters, professor of English and Creative Writing, has won the prestigious Award for Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is one of only eight writers nationwide to win the award this year.

The Academy’s 250 members nominate candidates, and a rotating committee of writers selects winners. The members of the 2003 committee were Ann Beattie, Horton Foote, George Plimpton, Robert Pinsky, Elizabeth Spencer, and Charles Wright.

"I was really quite delighted of course, but surprised. This award is not something you apply for or fill out forms for. It just happens," Masters said.

Masters, the author of 12 books, has taught at Carnegie Mellon since 1983. Prior to coming to Carnegie Mellon, he was a Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Jyvaskyla in Finland, and he has been a visiting writer at several universities including Ohio University and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

"This award is well-deserved and unusual from many other awards writers receive. It is not based on a single submission but on the estimation of Hilary’s peers on the body of writing he has produced," said David Kaufer, head of the Department of English at Carnegie Mellon.

Masters’ books include eight novels and two short story collections. He also has written a memoir.

Carnegie Mellon Press publishes Inventing Victor

This spring, Carnegie Mellon Press is releasing Inventing Victor, the first collection of short stories by Carnegie Mellon alum Jennifer Bannan.

Bannan wrote the first story of the collection while she was an undergraduate. The other nine stories have been written over the last twelve years since she graduated. She says that seeing the manuscript come together as a book has been a wonderful process. "We had a lot of help from students. I appreciated their input so much: on things like which stories to cut and which order to present the stories. I wanted the book to have the energy that a student reader might help bring to it. So I am really thankful for the students.

I'm also so grateful to my writer's group—most of whom are also Carnegie Mellon grads. They have given me an incredible amount of help in revising my stories—even before we knew it would be published," Bannan said.

"Jennifer was a student in one of my first workshops here at Carnegie Mellon," says professor and fiction editor Sharon Dilworth. "She was a talented, engaging, energetic writer back then and I've been a huge fan of her work ever since. She's got this lovely quirky approach to fiction, her narrative voices are always strong and extremely perceptive. The book is full of humor, full of sadness, and most of all full of good writing. I’m proud to have published Jen's work."

Following a pre-publication reading at the Associated Writing Programs conference in Baltimore in February, Bannan is planning a brief promotional tour for Inventing Victor. "I'm planning to do as many readings as I can in cities wherever I have friends who'll give me a place to sleep. That will cover probably a dozen cities," she said. A publication party in Pittsburgh is planned, as well as advertisements for the book in selected literary journals.

Inventing Victor is currently available from Carnegie Mellon University Press (all titles are $15.95 and available through Cornell University Press Services) as well as Barnes&Noble.com, amazon.com, and other retail outlets this fall.

Last Stands: Notes from Memory and as well as a collection of essays, In Montaigne's Tower. Masters will receive his award May 21 in New York City. It carries a $7,500 prize.

"I'm really very pleased that this has happened to my work and I'm really quite honored that it has come from other writers, and that they have recognized my work. I'm glad it has happened while I'm at Carnegie Mellon, which has supported me these 20 years," Masters said.
Students intern for Warner Bros.

Vahanian, Ciesla find themselves on the other side of a television set

If the expectations for internships are busy work and filing, Adam Vahanian and Meagan Ciesla were both in for an experience that defied those expectations when they interned with Warner Bros. last summer. Ciesla went to New York City, where she worked for the Warner Bros. marketing department and Kids WB! promotions. Vahanian interned for The WB Network 100+ Station Group in Los Angeles, where he transitioned from department to department to gain a broad understanding of all the elements that go into making television.

Vahanian and Ciesla were both awarded scholarships and interned through the Family Friendly Programming Forum, a group of over 40 major national advertisers who are working to increase family friendly programming choices on television. The Forum chose Carnegie Mellon as one of three schools to which it awards scholarships because it is considered one of the best programs in the country for preparing students for careers in television and film.

"Interns rarely get the chance to experience numerous aspects of the field in which they wish to pursue a career, while working on a one-on-one basis with a variety of professionals," Vahanian said. His internship was coordinated by Jason Viso, director of scheduling and programming for The WB Network 100+ Station Group. Vahanian worked with WB teams involved in analyzing the quality of television, creating effective programming lineups, and deciding which movie packages to purchase. Moving to different departments, he also learned about publicity and promotional writing, media services, and Nielsen Designated Market Area research.

Ciesla, who is still enrolled in the creative writing program, worked with product placement issues for WB's primetime marketing department.

"Interns rarely get the chance to experience numerous aspects of the field in which they wish to pursue a career, while working on a one-on-one basis with a variety of professionals."

"Warner Brothers had been having some problems with unpaid product placements within their scenes on the WB series, so I would go through different series and try to determine which products were present that perhaps should not have been shown within the shots," Ciesla said. She says both of her main projects were rewarding because her work had direct results for the network. For the Kids' WB!, she worked primarily on promotional recaps. "I would collect all information about sweepstakes that had been sponsored by the Kids' WB! and later send them to WB clients in order to add closure to the sweepstakes deal and also encourage further business from each company."

An extra benefit of her summer internship was the chance to live in New York City. "I ended up living in Hoboken right outside of Manhattan, but the commute wasn't bad at all," Ciesla said. "I would actually enjoy walking from the bus station to work everyday because New York is so rich—there is so much to see and do. I loved being able to get off of work and go to see a show or a concert every day if I wanted."

Ciesla and Vahanian agree that learning the business side of the network through the Family Forum internships creates a balance with their creative work that makes them better prepared for careers in the industry. Both remain committed to their interest in writing for television and film.
Carnegie Mellon was weird. Hollywood is weirder.
Sage advice on the happenstance from Rebecca Barkin

I pulled my bags from the LAX turnstile March 6, 2002. I had a check for $1250.42, that was my life-savings thus far. I was convinced that this money, combined with ambition and relentless optimism was enough to get me on my feet in Los Angeles. I now blame my naiveté on those television specials and articles written about Madonna, and how she arrived in NYC with nothing but her panties and a couple hundred bucks. Mom, don't you see that her lack of material possessions, stability, and money served great inspiration for success? Right.

I've had 7 jobs in the past year. I've had a hard time finding a community and even harder time paying rent. I can make 20 dollars last two weeks—a skill that I've honed. I've sold energy bars at Bally Total Fitness, been a Personal Trainer, and a waitress. I've temped as an Assistant, been a Club Promoter, and I've lied my way into being an instructor at a Surf camp. To understand the comedy here, you'd have to know that I am from Pittsburgh, I have never surfed, I have a crippling fear of drowning, and more specifically, drowning in the Pacific Ocean. In addition, I had no medical insurance at the time (my parents' favorite detail).

I remember my first day driving to the beach in Malibu to begin my new career as a "Surf Instructor." I remember pulling into my parking space, facing an ominous and beautiful gray sky like a blanket over the indifferent and monstrous Pacific. I had two voices in my head: one was angry and panicked; the other was liberated and adventurous. I knew that many celebrities and Hollywood big shots were sending their kids to this camp, trusting me to take care of their little ones. Foolish parents. I was thinking that this was the perfect chance to score a new contact, and consequently, a new career.

I nearly drowned twice that summer. The camp owner, a fitness-obsessed cheeseball who never shed his sunglasses and only ate apples and almonds, forgot to pay us twice. I was picking up extra shifts at my other jobs, and calling mom and dad for funds. I was exhausted and crying a lot.

And then one day, in true Hollywood form, the father of one of my camp favorites approached me. I was pulling my Carnegie Mellon sweatshirt over my bikini, and when I opened my eyes, there he was, seeming importent and impatient.

"So you went to Carnegie Mellon? That's a great school."

I nodded.

"Max (his 10 year old daughter) told me that you want a job in the Music Business."

The Music Business? Um, okay, I'll go with it. My knees leaned in to each other for comfort, a little awkward, as I'd never had a job interview in a bikini.

Two weeks later, after surviving two grueling interviews and several blatant attempts at intimidation, I was plucked from the beach and placed as a temp Assistant to the Senior VP of Marketing for EMI-Capitol Records. A month after that, I was moved to Publicity as a temp. And finally a month after that, offered a position as a Publicist.

This is the way things go out here. People call it luck. I call it sweating through the process of achieving proper positioning, and then being ready to receive the opportunity gracefully.

My point is this, writers: avail yourself to any opportunity. I came out here to write for the entertainment industry, and myself of course. I thought having a very specific career in mind, and pursuing it relentlessly was the way to achieve my goals and great success. What I've found is that you've got to just jump in, and then zig-zag like all hell to get to your personal Mt. Zion.

I never considered being a Publicist in the music business as a possible path for someone with my educational background. But truthfully, it's been quite organic, very educational in many ways, and plenty of fun. I work with major magazine writers everyday, from Rolling Stone to The New York Times. I write press releases and I pitch various media outlets on our music and our artists.

I'm enjoying watching all the gears work. More importantly, I feel that I've struck a balance between creativity and business, a job that pays the rent and is fulfilling in a way that my freelance fiction writing just can't be at the present time.

Anyway, enough said for now. Enjoy the summer. Write. Oh, and save some money too.
Jane Bernstein
This summer I'm hoping to complete a novel about a physician in New Jersey whose obsession with taking care of people wreaks havoc on his family. The book was called *Stella Turns His Head* until I dumped Stella from the narrative. It is, at present, without a title.

I assigned Ian McEwan's *Atonement* to my advanced fiction seminar and thought it was a great book, deserving of all its honors. I'll begin my summer reading by digging into novels written by writers I've met (two in the stack include *Like Beauty*, and *The Boy on the Bus*.) I've been pressured into finishing *The Corrections*, which I abandoned two-thirds through last summer. And I'll start reading fiction and nonfiction by Israeli writers, in preparation for my Fulbright in Tel Aviv for Spring 2004. I'll be a writer in residence at Bar Ilan University.

Anthony Butts
I am currently reading work by the fiction writer Margaret Atwood and the poet Chase Twichell. Along with them, I have just put in a subscription to the *New York Review of Books* because I'm in need of more sources of unique work to read.

My current work involves a series of love poems, work which I've never delved into before. Along with that sequence is a sequence of poems dealing with various aspects of the world as they relate to living happy and well.

Gerald Costanzo
I've just put the final touches on a project I began nearly two years ago. It's the editing of and writing an introduction to a collection of the poems of James W. Hall which is to be issued by a commercial publisher next year. Those of you who have worked with me at the Press will recall the collections we produced, beginning back in 1977, by Jim Hall. Since he has written no poems since 1986, my task has been to arrange the poems (I decided upon a "collected" rather than a "selected" volume) and to be involved in extensive copyediting.

In addition to immersing myself in the work of Jim Hall, I've just finished reading a new collection of essays by Jonathan Franzen (*How to Be Alone*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002) primarily on the notion that the man who single-handedly ended Oprah's Book Club ought to be looked into if not explained. The themes of these essays, in various ways, extend and make personal, the impetus of the novels: the erosion of civic life and of personal dignity. How sad, as in the Oprah fiasco, that the artist in America who gains for response to his "sensitivity" a sort of cultural irritation, becomes himself a little arrogant, a trifle insensitive. A bit exemplary of his own thesis.

Jim Daniels
*Trace of One*, poems by Joanna Goodman, winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize. What I like most about this book is its inclusiveness. It's not the grand, slap-you-on-the-back inclusiveness of Whitman, or the nearly boastful, exuberant inclusiveness of Gerald Stern; it's a modest, gentle generosity, like the soft kiss on the cheek of someone who will forgive you for everything. The other thing I like is the attention to language from the perspective of someone who clearly loves language and isn't simply being clever or arbitrary.

After finishing up my book of new and selected poems, due later this year, I feel like I've got a clean slate and can move forward with brand-new work—poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and perhaps a new screenplay, so I don't have a specific new project in progress. My children, Ramsey and Rosalie, 9 and 7, are keeping me busy. I've started a second career as a soccer coach, though I never played a game in my life. I figure if I can teach poetry for twenty years, then I can do anything.
Sharon Dilworth

Even though I started The Cousin in the Backyard, as a short story, about interfamily dynamics, for some reason it has turned into a novel about HISTORY, SEX, AND DEATH. Eve, a woman caught in a city, not unlike present day Pittsburgh, discovers that when you ignore the past it not only repeats itself, it bites you in the rear. A revolutionary who nevertheless cannot rebel, Eve finds herself trapped by past circum-stances, and yet is unwilling to confront the truth about what's really happened to her and to her family. There is a homosexual husband, a gun-toting cousin, a dog named Spot, and a phalanx of hairdressers to complete the spectacle.

As I'm hoping to finish a murder mystery this summer (it takes place in the Club Med in Ixtapa, Mexico—all the workers are suspects, no one can identify the body), I've been reading a great number of murder mysteries including good ones by Hanning Mankell, Sebastian Faulk, and Elizabeth George.

Favorite all time novel this year was Any Human Heart, by William Boyd. I also thought Pushkin's Children by Tatyan Tolstaya was a wonderful collection of essays on contemporary Russia.

Terrance Hayes

An absolutely honest list of books I've read, per-used, and consumed

the last month: Six Small Fires by Paul Jenkins (twice), The Essential Rilke, Galway Kinnell's translation (presently skimming), The Four Questions of Melacholy by Tomaz Salamun (half a dozen of the poems), Famous Americans by Loren Goodman (twice), Without End by Adam Zagajewski (a quarter of the poems), Resurrection Update by James Galvin (three times and count-ing), Change Gonna Come: Race, Music and the Soul of America by Craig Werner (once), Little Low Heaven by Anthony Butts (once), The Other Lover by Bruce Smith (twice), Morning Constitu-tional by Michael Magee (one & half), The End of the Novel of Love by Vivian Gornick (two essays), MOJO Music magazine (every issue)—feels like I've forgotten something.

The dream is to write poems as diverse and unpredictable as those I read in the books I en-counter. "To embrace no style is to embrace all styles," someone must have said somewhere. Mostly I'm writing poems that explore culture (Race, Class, Gender)—But reading is where it's at! I love the way words bump and grind against each other in tight spaces. Sometimes sentences leave me dazed and breathless. Yes, reading's why I write.

Hilary Masters

Currently I am reading Frida, a biography of Frida Kahlo, by Hayden Herrera. The book is better than the movie. Also, Richard Bausch's new novel, Hello to the Cannibals and Major Jackson's collection of poems, Leaving Saturn. The usual Chekhovs.

As for my work, my research on the Mexican muralist Juan O'Gorman is pretty much completed, and I have begun to put some ideas down on paper. I also plan to do some revision on my new novel Sam's Place. These two projects will go with me to Paris in January where I will spend my sabbatical through May with the exception of the month of April when I will be at the American Academy in Rome as a Visiting Artist.

Jane McCafferty

I've recently completed a second collection of short stories, Thank you For The Music which will be published in January 2004. The stories all seem to involve music in some way, either implicitly or quite explicitly. They were all written over the course of the past seven or eight years. I also completed a second novel, which focuses on a musician named Manuel, who jumps out of a 27 year marriage and into a life of emotional chaos. He meets a few characters, and they all change the course of one another's lives. The novel looks at Manuel's negotiation with memory, along with his relationship to his music, religion, and romantic love. This novel will appear in 2005.

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— on shows such as Boomtown, Law & Order: SVU, The Dead Zone, The Pretender, Charmed, The Chronicle, and seaQuest.*

Moving through his career from writer to producer, Grillo-Marxuach says the next big step is to create and run his own series. He's successfully sold several pilot scripts to the networks, but even that is a difficult process with high financial stakes and a low success rate. One of his pilots was filmed but was ultimately not ordered as a series. He has a pilot script at NBC in contention for the 2003-04 season, vying for one of a few spots for new series. "If this one doesn't make it," he says, "I will hopefully continue to write and produce on other people's series, continue to gain mastery over the form, and continue to produce new material that might eventually yield a successful series of my own."

Not surprisingly, "leisure time" is not a phrase that pops up often in Grillo-Marxuach's vocabulary. Amidst spending time with his wife and their two dogs, the occasional bit of Kendo (a sporting form of Japanese sword-fighting that he practices with somewhat regularly, and often fails at that, much to the dismay of his teachers), he still finds writing to be a nearly all-consuming activity. "When I'm not writing, I'm reading, researching, or doing things like editing my home movies or keeping up with the latest films and TV shows — anything that will make me a better creator of television. When I'm not writing I become a raving neurotic, drive my wife up the wall with my fidgeting, consume a steady diet of coffee and finger nails and panic about whether or not I've 'lost it.'"

Javier Grillo-Marxuach

industry tremendously satisfying, in part because of a dynamic balance of independent and collaborative work. Like any job, however, Grillo-Marxuach says writing for TV can have its frustrating moments. "During those times I tend to go off and do independent projects with little commercial use — so I have done things like short films and plays to keep my creative chops up when 'the day-job' doesn't fulfill my individual creative needs."

Among those projects are his cycle of one-act plays, Concertos For Double Helix, which premiered in Los Angeles in 1997, and his short play Sudden Life, which was performed as part of the 1998 New York City Festival of One-Act Plays. In 2000, Grillo-Marxuach wrote and directed a satirical short film entitled Cops On The Edge: Episode 89. The film is available for viewing at www.Alwaysi.com, and received an Honorable Mention at the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival.

Faculty news

Jane McCafferty

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Finally, I'm interested in writing more essays. I plan to write an essay about a place called Ghost Ranch, in New Mexico this summer, where Georgia O'Keeffe once painted. I have envisioned a book of essays about landscape and its affect on the spirit. This is just an idea, but I do hope I'll pursue it starting this summer.

Currently I'm reading The Emigrants by the writer Sebald who died last year at age 57 in a car accident.
Carnegie Mellon Writers Go Hollywood:
Laura Harkcom & Chris Leone

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class that I fell in love with long form (feature film writing).

Briefly trace your career from Carnegie Mellon to the present.

CHRIS: Graduated in 1993. In 1994, I moved to Los Angeles on a vague whim. My friend Dan Candella, also a CMU grad, hired me at Sony Imageworks, which was then still an up-and-coming visual effects company. I was in the Film Recording department, where I shot the finished digital effects back to film. Surprisingly I learned a tremendous amount about cinematography, film processing, color timing—much more than I expected.

In 1996, I was hired at a visual effects company called Digital FilmWorks, where I gained a much broader background in visual effects. I taught myself CG animation, and in 1999 made a short animated film called To Build a Better Mousetrap that played in film festivals and on television all over the world.

I knew Laura Harkcom only slightly at CMU, but by 1998 we had become writing partners. We sold our first pitch, a sci-fi film called Extinction, to Sony Pictures in 1999. In 2000, we sold our next project, a CG-animated film called Time Dogs, to Jim Henson Pictures, with me attached as director and Laura as producer, and in early 2002, Miramax hired us to write a kids' movie called Project Bigfoot.

Next month we're heading up to Vancouver to start animation tests for Time Dogs, which hopefully will be released in 2005.

LAURA: I graduated in 1993, and moved to LA a week later to begin an internship for a producer based at The Walt Disney Studios. Although my title was "intern," I was essentially a glorified assistant. My job entailed making coffee and scheduling my boss' racquetball appointments. But I also got to read and make copies of every script, confidential memo and budget that came through the office. My boss also allowed me to listen in on his phone calls, so that I could get a feel for how the agents, producers, studio executives and stars communicated with one another.

It turned out to be an invaluable experience, and also led to my first paying job as a story analyst in 1994. My boss was impressed with my ability to critique and develop ideas, so she took me with her and promoted me to the position of Creative Executive when she started up the feature animation division at Warner Bros. Studios in 1995.

In that position, I created ideas for movies, hired writers, and worked with those writers to develop scripts. I worked at Warner Bros. for four years, and was appointed department head in 1998. However, the further up the ladder I got, the less creative the job became, and I realized that I had lost sight of my original goal. Fortunately, Chris and I decided to partner around this time, so I left the studio and have been working with Chris ever since.

What project that you've completed brought you the most satisfaction and why?
CHRIS: None of our feature scripts have been made yet, so I don't think of them as completed. Of what I'd call completed work, my CG cartoon To Build a Better Mousetrap has brought me the greatest satisfaction by far. I liked the technical challenge of a CG film as much as the creative. Mousetrap also did incredibly well in the film festival circuit, and played on TV here and in Europe. It was great to see with an audience, everybody would go berserk.

What are your future plans?
CHRIS: Aha, refer back to question #1. My immediate plan is to direct Time Dogs.

LAURA: And mine, to produce it.

What kind of balance is there between the collaborative and the independent in the writing that you do?
CHRIS: It differs from project to project. On Time Dogs, Laura and I planned out the story meticulously, then I went off and wrote the script. On Project Bigfoot, we split the writing and emailed the script back and forth. Now we're collaborating on two new original ideas, but I'm going to write one and Laura will write the other. It just depends on who's obsessed with what.

LAURA: To add to what Chris said, I attribute our successful partnership to our complimentary talents and skill sets. Because Chris writes and directs, and I write and produce, we tend to cover more ground creatively. And because

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there are two of us, we
can trade off work on our
various projects, and keep
more than one
project going at a time.

How do you keep your
creative fire
burning—are there any
particular things that
you do for inspiration?

CHRIS: I take a lot of
classes. Acting, drawing,
cinematography. Anything
except writing. Every
discipline seems to inform
everything else. The
acting classes specifically
have made me a far better
writer.

LAURA: I read A LOT of
scripts, see a fair amount
of theater, and try to
watch as many movies as
I can. When I see/read a
bad movie, I'm reminded
of what not to do in my
own work. When I see/
read a great movie, it
reminds me why I'm in this
business.

What career advice
would you have for
writers currently in
college?

CHRIS: 1. Give up. I didn't
write anything sincere until
I gave up on writing and
abandoned the idea of
being a writer. It's very
liberating, I highly recom-
mend it. Let academia
wash off you for a while.
The writing will either
come back or it won't.

2. If you want to be a
screenwriter, move to Los
Angeles. You're kidding
yourself otherwise.

3. Finish your projects. If
you can finish a project,
you're ahead of 95% of
the jokers out there.

4. Don't be discouraged
when people tell you what
a tough business it is, or
how difficult it is to make a
living as a writer. It's true,
but that's what's GOOD
about it. If every moron
could scale Mount
Everest, there wouldn't be
much sport in it.

LAURA: Make sure that
you either love what you
do, or that you can't
imagine doing anything
else. Otherwise, the
amount of heartbreak and
rejection involved in the
job simply isn't worth it.
Equally important—you
must believe in your work.
Let no amount of rejection
stop you. Persistence
accounts for at least 50
percent of all Hollywood
success stories.