

Faculty spends sabbatical reaching out



Dan Bailey/The Clackamas Print

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Sabbaticals are supposed to be about doing something during your time off that helps further your teaching in some way. Kate Gray, an English teacher at CCC, poet and fiction writer is doing just this.

Gray has worked at CCC for approximately 20 years and is now trying to further her teaching skills while also doing things that she loves. I had the chance to interview her during her busy schedule to learn more about what she is doing. The main focus of her sabbatical is to figure out how personal stories affect communities. She has chosen several different areas to concentrate on.

The Clackamas Print: Can you tell us about what you do on campus?

Kate Gray: I am an English instructor and I am also in something called the Continuous Learning Cooperative. So I help facilitate professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. That is a part of my job.

TCP: What made you decide you wanted to go on sabbatical?

KG: Sabbatical happens every seven years so it is an honor that the full-time faculty have this as part of their contract.

TCP: What are some of the things you have done so far?

KG: I am working with a group in Canby called Bridging Cultures which is trying to bridge the Anglo with the Latinos in Canby. The folks haven't told their stories, so what I am hoping to see is if the dynamics in the community change once they do. I have also been looking at the surviving Japanese American WWII veterans in Hood River and the impact of them not telling their stories when they returned. And the impact of — just recently in 2012 — releasing their stories. I haven't heard yet how them telling their stories has changed the community. I also interviewed a girl who was sex trafficked in Medford, who as an adult has gone back to Medford to tell her story.

TCP: Can you tell me about your work at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility?

KG: There is a wait list (to be allowed to teach in the correctional facility) and what happens is that the folks are very close to their release date so that is one of the ways that the organizers pick who is going to be in the class. They (inmates) are eager and a little bit afraid. Most of the women in the room have never really written before, the majority. They immediately opened up and

wrote really raw honest stories that they wrote right away.

TCP: How is it different teaching at a community college compared to these things you are doing during your sabbatical?

KG: Talking to people whose first language is not English, like the folks I am working with in Canby, makes everything you say more precious, not precious like puppies, but more careful and more of a gift. Working with people that are chronically homeless, which I did last spring, I was very careful about what I said. Each one you are very careful. You do not want to alienate anybody. You want to be a day ahead of the students and bringing people to where they want to go.

TCP: What do you enjoy most about teaching and what made you want to be a teacher?

KG: I have just about always wanted to be a teacher and the same thing with wanting to be a writer. I love the unexpected in the classroom. I love when people work off each other's energy and teach each other. And when they get excited about their own knowledge and the knowledge they are getting. It makes me happy. When I was sitting with the folks at Coffee Creek they were laughing so hard, all I could think was this is it, this is what I want to do.

GRAY

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