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Dr. Jim Elledge: A Student's Appreciation

By: Michael Goodwin

Dr. Jim Elledge served the MAPW program well in his tenure as director, and I commend him for that, but my thanks to him are far more personal. Long before I ever wrote stories or games, long before I was published, I was a poet. I got my start as a writer with the usual angsty teenage poetry that any decent writer cringes to look back on, but poetry is poetry, and verse has lived at the heart of my identity as a writer from the day I considered myself one.

While I have had other skilled poetry teachers over the years, Dr. Elledge brought out the best in my work. He gave me permission to speak with an unfettered voice, to not only indulge my passions but exult in them. He dared me to be bold, to say what I dared not say in day-to-day life. He pulled out my voice, sometimes trembling and hesitant, and in so doing, he made that voice soar. That was the essence of his teaching. He did not make poets. He made poets better. In this, he was a living muse, a dear friend and confidante with whom I could wrestle the challenges of life and figure out how to talk about them.

For all he did to nurture my talent with overbrimming positive energy, my fondest memory of him as a muse was when he cracked down on me to finally finish my capstone project or be ejected from the MAPW program. This was not meanness or spite, and he was very calm in his delivery. He did not want to kick me out. He knew I was capable and very much hoped that I would rise to the challenge before me. And so I did. I am a better writer for having been his student. More than that, though, I am a better and more thoughtful person. I will always count Dr. Elledge among my greatest mentors. He believed in me, as was his way to believe in all his students. When I needed soft encouragement, he gave me that in glorious abundance. When I needed firm direction, he did so without a hint of tyranny. Truly, he was as much a master in his handling of students as he was a master of his own writing craft.

I could not have asked for a kinder, wiser, or more brilliant teacher. Thank you, Dr. Elledge, and may you enjoy your well-earned retirement. I am proud I was your student. I am proud that I made you proud. And I know am very much not alone. So, I think I speak for the multitudes you have taught when I salute you in the fine tradition and fitting verse of Dead Poets Society, "Oh Captain, my Captain." Be well and my love to you always.