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MAPW Alumni Profile: Drew Brown

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My Journey from MAPW Student to War Correspondent

By Drew Brown

Drew Brown ('98) was a member of the inaugural class of the MAPW program and graduated with a concentration in creative writing. Having worked as a journalist covering the wars in the Middle East, he now spends his days as a freelance writer living between DaNang, Vietnam and Lizella, Georgia, USA.

I credit the MAPW program for launching me into my journalism career. If I had not taken the feature writing course, and already been trying to freelance a bit, I don't think I would've had the confidence to answer the ad for my first newspaper job in Carrollton.

I worked as a journalist from 1997 through 2010. I still occasionally do a little freelance. I began working as a general assignment reporter for the "Times-Georgian" of Carrollton while still a MAPW student. I got hired by the Macon Telegraph to cover Robins Air Force Base in 1999. Soon after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks occurred, I got loaned out by the Telegraph to the Knight Ridder Newspapers Washington Bureau, which was looking for volunteers to cover what everyone knew would be a war in Afghanistan. The bureau wanted people who had covered war, or had served in combat, or had served in the military, or had experience covering the military and who were comfortable traveling and working overseas.

I had served as a U.S. Army Ranger from 1989 to 1993,

and was a combat veteran of the 1989 invasion of Panama. I had trained in Kuwait in the aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. I had also traveled extensively in Mexico, Central and South America. When I saw the email from Kathleen Carroll, who was then the Knight Ridder DC bureau chief, I called her, and told her a little about my background and my work for the Telegraph. "I'm the man for the mission," I told her. "And I'm not going to take no for an answer."

I ended up covering Afghanistan and Iraq for the Knight Ridder Washington Bureau from 2001-2003. The bureau hired me full-time during my first trip to Afghanistan. I covered the Pentagon full-time for Knight Ridder from 2003-2007, but was never very good at it. I took a job in 2007 as a writer and photographer with Stars and Stripes, the U.S. military newspaper for troops overseas, and covered the war in Iraq for them from 2007-2008 and the war in Afghanistan from 2008 through the end of 2010.

One of the things I regret most about my journalism career is that I essentially stopped writing fiction as soon as I got my first newspaper job. I never really learned how to balance the two. Also, war journalism is all-consuming, and over time, I just put my fiction aside. However, since I'm no longer working in daily journalism, it is something that I plan to take up again. Like most newspaper journalists, I feel like I've got a novel or two in my head just waiting to be written.

I have fond memories of the fiction and poetry workshops and the camaraderie I enjoyed with fellow students in the MAPW program. Our nights at the Taco Mac were always a lot of fun.

My best advice to current or prospective MAPW students is to take as wide a variety of writing classes as possible. Looking back, I wish I had focused a bit more on technical writing, marketing and blogging, although the latter was very much in its infancy back then. Some of the lessons I've learned over the years include: network as much as possible and stay in touch with classmates after you graduate.

Never give up on yourself or your talents or your commitment to your art or your craft. Never be afraid to take chances. There is a lot of truth in the saying "fake it until you make it." Keep abreast of emerging technologies and trends in your chosen field. If you don't, then it's very easy to get left behind.

I'm really not working on anything at the moment. But

one of the projects I'm most proud of is a story and photo project I did for McClatchy Newspapers on Agent Orange three years ago while living in Vietnam. I'm also rather proud of a project I did on Qaeda got away from Tora Bora in Afghanistan early in the war. That latter one seems like ancient history now. There are, of course, many stories from both wars that I'm proud of, but I wrote hundreds, so it's kind of difficult to pick just a handful. I started putting together a page with a bunch of story links to put on my photo website a couple of years ago, but I never finished it.

It's interesting sometimes to see where my work has ended up. One of the great things about working for a news service is that a story you write can end up literally anywhere in the world. Even now, when I go back and google some of my work, the original story links have sometimes disappeared, but the stories live on where they have been picked up on other sites.

I do have a [photo website](#), but it is in dire need of updating. I had hoped at one point to segue from writing into photojournalism, but I think I probably started too late, and it did not help that my journalism career spanned the last good years and then the sad decline of the newspaper business.



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