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On Capstones: Judy Benowitz, MAPW Alumna

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Judy Benowitz



My graduation year is: Spring 2017.

My MAPW concentration and support area are: Creative Writing with Applied Writing as my support area.

My capstone committee: During the fall semester of 2017, I contacted Dr. William Rice and Dr. Linda Niemann with an abbreviated book proposal of my memoir. They agreed to work with me the following spring semester to write the memoir as my capstone.

On capstone planning and for those who are starting to think about capstone: Although Kennesaw advises students to take two semesters to complete their thesis, I did mine in one semester along with taking my last applied course required to graduate. It was a lot of work--150 pages of script. Now, I understand why the University advises you to take two semesters, but my memoir was already written so I just needed to edit and polish it. Also, I met with my committee once a month in person or via email, reviewing 30 pages each session.

My capstone project: “[Highway 11](#)” is a 60,000 word nonfiction I have been writing for seven years. My biggest challenge was the opening chapter-- where to begin to engage my reader. My committee helped me chose the best place to begin. After reading three versions, we found one that worked well for the story.

With a BA in Drama, a public reading of my work was a natural choice rather than an oral defense with my committee. Dr. Margaret Walter’s classroom provided the venue with an enthusiastic audience of classmates, invited faculty, my husband, and friends. The final PDF was submitted to digital commons at Kennesaw.

I am a story teller published in both fiction and nonfiction short stories. I also write poems, plays, and screen plays. I hope to advance beyond the short story to a book. During my last semester at Kennesaw, I took a biography course with Dr. Walters. I wrote about my mother as a US Navy WAVE during WWII. I enjoyed researching her and hope to make her story a prequel to my memoir.

My favorite part of writing the capstone was:

Editing with my committee. Moving different sections of the story sometimes changed the tone. I would advise anyone contemplating their capstone to find something they enjoy writing about, and it helps if they have been working on it for a while and have pages already generated. That is the whole reason I enrolled at Kennesaw State University—to learn to write a book.

On capstone research: I have lived a long life—68 years of memory and history of this country. Most of my research comes from my memory, but I wanted this story to read like historical nonfiction written in the first person. Since my memoir dates from 1950 to 2010, I researched many historical events I grew up watching on TV. This gave me a frame of reference for the culture of that time.

My high school was integrated in 1965. The short story is in my memoir. I was a hippie protesting the Vietnam War in Atlanta for the Age of Aquarius in 1969. While attending school at Georgia State University, I read “The Great Speckled Bird” an underground newspaper written by activists at Emory University. This is also where I met my husband, Bob, a nice Jewish boy, and I converted to Judaism.

In 1972, as a flight attendant for United Airlines, I lived in Washington D. C. during the Watergate Scandal. I read Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, journalists for the Washington Post that landed on my doorstep each day. My research helped me with details. On my flights, I met many famous people including Senator Ted Kennedy, who would become the Lion of the Senate after 50 years of service. I wrote little character sketches of these people from memory, but I also used google to research their history and details of the facts and chronology. My career with United ended in 1981 with Deregulation also known as Reagonomics. I was an actress in Los Angeles. Seduced by the movie industry in the ‘70s, I went back to school for a degree in Drama from the University of California, Irvine.

I researched all of these historical times to enrich my story: a story that is a snapshot of a time gone by.