

April 18, 2016

Dear Class,

As I sit at this imitation-wood desk that is barely visible under a heap of printed assignment sheets, yellow Post-It notes and dog-eared novels, I find my mind wandering from the 20-1 course outline I am supposed to be crafting to my own school years. More than 25 years ago when I was in Grade 11, you would have found my nose firmly planted in a novel, my mind engaged in admiration of the words and images that danced before my eyes, and my fingers furiously flipping the pages as fast as they possibly could.

Today I am not only a reader of literature, but a teacher of literature, too. I find myself here at CCH as a teacher intern during the last leg of my six-year journey through the University of Lethbridge. From Shakespeare to Thomas King, the world of the novel continues to help me explore the highs and lows of the human spirit. My English classes are bound to these types of stories. Of course being a teacher also involves marking. Mountains of papers satiated with red ink burden my desk, itching to be returned to their writers. My days are consumed with these thoughts, and with my passion for teaching reading and writing. Planning and marking devour my nights. Yet can you fathom my thirst for each new day?

However, the tale of how I wound my way into Room 514 takes us a couple of provinces to the east. I grew up in Swan River, Manitoba, a tiny rural town known for golden wheat fields and emerald green trees that dot the rolling hills. In Grade 10 I answered an advertisement for a cub reporter to cover my school's sports scene. That part-time gig at my town's newspaper turned into a full-time one once I graduated high school. Eventually my career took me and my pencils (ink freezes outdoors when the temperature plummets) across all three Prairie provinces, talking to high-profile celebrities and ordinary people who do extraordinary things. I continue to work as a freelance journalist and annually volunteer as a judge for provincial newspaper-writing competitions.

Without question, though, my favourite chapter in my story is my family: a boy in Grade 3, a girl in Grade 10, a hard-working husband, and a couple of comical dogs named Cricket and LeBron. Our weekend adventures take us camping in the shadows of Banff's mountains, sitting on cold metal bleachers to cheer our favourite CFL teams, whipping up culinary creations in our kitchen, and primping the plants around our home.

Stories have always been a large part of my life, and now I look forward to being a part of your Grade 11 story between now and when my internship ends on May 27. Welcome to Room 514.

Yours truly,

Ms. Alisha Sims
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