

Gabrielle A. Piccirilli
MFA Creative Writing (Fiction) Applicant
Personal Statement (EXCERPT FOR PORTFOLIO)

“Creative writing,” I said, raising my voice slightly so the woman beside me could hear over the noise of the networking reception. She tilted her head, surprised. “That’s not a minor,” she said with a quick, dismissive laugh. “That’s just a fun high school class. Why would you study that?”

The nineteen-year-old at the table managed a practiced smile, but somewhere inside, a little girl shrank back, clutching the cardboard book she once made with glue, ribbon, crayons, and far too much of her parents’ printer paper.

I write for her. I’ve chosen to study writing, and I want to keep studying it, to grow worthy of her dreams and to honor her certainty, her wonder, and her belief that stories matter. To show her that her dreams weren’t naïve, but only waiting for someone brave enough to keep them alive.

That moment didn’t discourage me. It clarified my purpose. It reminded me why I write and why I’m committed to growing as a storyteller. It carried me into the writing spaces that shaped me. Each experience strengthened my conviction that writing isn’t just something I love, it’s something I am building my life around.

My pursuit of a career in writing isn’t just for me; it’s for the lives I hope to touch. Growing up on trilogies like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, and having strong, brave female characters written by successful female authors to look up to, shaped how I understood myself and my place in the world. I want to provide not just entertainment, but a sense of power and resilience in readers from the worlds, characters, and narratives I build.

As for craft influences, an undergraduate professor once taught me a powerful lesson. He never allowed the workshopping author to speak, interject, or clarify a work, even after the

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conclusion of the workshop. They essentially became invisible, an omnipresent viewer seeing how their work was being dissected. He told us, “You can’t go home with the reader. You don’t hover over their shoulder as they read. Your work has to stand alone.” This remains one of the most influential principles guiding my writing. I keep it at the forefront of my mind as I choose words, phrasing, and structure: Is my intent clear? Am I doing a disservice to my reader? Would I feel a need to jump in and clarify this? It has become a cornerstone of my creative practice.

In March 2025, I took my writing out of the Pennsylvania seminar circles it was used to and on a study-abroad trip to Belfast at the Seamus Heaney Centre of Queen’s University. There, writers truly spoke to me. I encountered a vulnerability and honesty I hadn’t experienced much in my studies in the U.S. One writer shared that “writing is the transformation from raw material of one’s own life... the traumatic wound that speaks,” and another told us that, in her community, “women were not meant to have voices and write books about politics and sex. They were just expected to plant a garden at their parents’ house.” Those words reframed what I understood writing to be. Workshops and one-on-one meetings showed me how varied the process can look, whether meticulously planned or joyfully chaotic, but also how universal its purpose is: to make sense of the world and to say something true.

For years, writing had been something I pursued whenever I could fit it into the margins of my life, between classes, internships, research projects, and responsibilities that always seemed to take priority. I don’t want writing to live in the margins anymore. As I finish my M.A. in Communication, I find myself returning to fiction with more intention than ever, and I’m ready for mentorship that challenges me to push my work further than I can alone. The momentum I’ve built, through study, practice, and lived experience, has reached a point where

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the next right step isn't "one day," but now. An MFA isn't just an aspiration, it is the structure, community, and discipline I need to grow into the writer I am becoming.



I often think about that white-clothed dinner table, the moment I was asked why anyone would study creative writing. I want this MFA because I know the answer now more clearly than I ever have. I've lived it. I write to understand the world, to make meaning from grief, to excavate truth, and to build worlds that remind readers of their own strength. I write because I have something to say.

And at DeSales, I'm ready to claim my place at the table, not apologizing for the dream, but honoring the little girl who held it first. The one who clutched her cardboard book and believed stories could save people. She didn't know the losses she would carry, the wounds she would write through, or the worlds she would one day build. But she believed in writing, and I believe in her.