

Senior Honors Project:

Magpie Literary Magazine

Katie Burnett

Mentor: Michael Knight, Creative Writing

Spring 2005

I. Beginnings

When I first began to really brainstorm for a senior honors project, I just assumed I would write a paper or a story, something most English or humanities majors do. Though I really wanted my project to reflect my genuine academic interests, there really are not a lot of options for a student whose entire world revolves around words. While an artist can express his or herself visually and a science major can work in a lab, humanities offers a relatively limited number of options for expression.

By my junior year, I still had not come up with a viable project idea. I was studying in Germany for a year, and I figured I would just write something combining that and English in some way. However, towards the end of my stay there, I received an email from my friend Jay, a fellow honors and English student. Jay and I have been in English classes together since our first semester at the University of Tennessee, and we have always had the bond of being simultaneously and inexplicably drawn towards pursuing an English major. To further our alliance, we are both writers, and most especially, critics. Most of our time together is spent evaluating whatever works we have just read, picking them apart and discussing how they could be better.

Thus, the email I received in Germany from Jay was both a surprise and completely expected. It read, to paraphrase, “You know how we always complain about bad writing? Why don’t we just show people what we think is good? Let’s publish our own magazine.”

I said, “Well, why not? And let’s make it our senior project, for added motivation.”

II. Motivations

The basic idea behind the publication of the *Magpie Literary Magazine* was to present a side of writing, and specifically Knoxville writing, that is not usually displayed in the traditional publications circulating around the city. We wanted to show something irreverent and new, something that reflects both work from the university and the city of Knoxville, without taking itself too seriously. Like the bird, we wanted the *Magpie* to collect and hoard whatever we could find, the only qualifier being that the texts were well-written and we enjoyed them.

In trying to publish something different, we decided to focus our energies on publishing primarily short stories. As a general rule, short prose is under-represented in most literary journals, for the simple reason that it is too expensive to print a large quantity of pages. We wanted our magazine to be an opportunity for prose writers to express themselves in ways they normally would not. Further, we wanted the focus of the magazine to be more on the writers themselves, rather than the texts published. It is the people who represent Knoxville, not the writing. Our aim was to print several works by each author, with each author accompanied by a short introduction written by one of the editors elaborating on the strengths of the writing. Thus, our magazine would be a flowing, solid collection of different works, tied together by their originality and ties to the community.

III. Funding and Approval

The largest obstacle we encountered while creating the magazine was obtaining approval and finding money to finance the endeavor. The first was relatively easy. Jay and I presented our idea to the Honors Program in our seminars, and though it was met with a certain amount of skepticism, the idea was approved. The next step was to find a mentor. At the time, I was enrolled in one of Michael Knight's fiction writing courses, 364. After class, I met with him briefly and pitched the idea. He agreed to be the guidance we needed whenever we were confused on the details of publishing or editing and signed his name.

Finding money was much more difficult, and initially the task was impossibly daunting. We met with Jack Williams at the university's Graphic Arts and Printing office, who gave us an estimate, which came to around nine-hundred dollars. Neither Jay nor I had that sort of money, so we talked Michael, who suggested that we talk to the English department. Subsequently, I drew up a proposal letter (see attached) and set up meetings with Dr. John Zomchick, the head of the English department, and Dr. Mark Luprecht in University Honors. Both agreed to contribute three-hundred dollars, which left us with another three-hundred. Upon Dr. Zomchick's advice, I emailed Lynn Champion, the head of Community Outreach, who immediately agreed to contribute the remaining funds.

IV. Advertising

Advertising for the magazine turned out to be a simple affair, though very low-budget. Most of our announcements consisted of fliers, designed by Jay, which were posted around campus (in the English department, the library, etc.) and around Knoxville, in places such as Tomato Head, bookstores, and coffee-shops (see attached). We decided to have applicants submit to our email addresses and a box set up in the Honors department. At first the response was minimal, which was frustrating. However, the longer we left up the fliers, and the more we posted, the more response we received. Still, the submissions were minimal, so we decided to place an advertisement in the Metro Pulse. It was from this that we drew most of our non-student submissions. We received numerous calls and emails in response to the relatively small block of space our ad occupied.

V. Selection

At the end of March and the beginning of April, we began the process of selecting from the submissions works we deemed suitable for publication. This proved to be arduous, for we received a much larger amount of poetry relative to prose. However, from the three-foot stack of submissions, we were able to extract several stories. Unfortunately, only one short story author submitted more than one story, so we were unable to select several from each author as we had originally intended. As for the poets, we attempted to find at least two poems from each author published, to give a more well-rounded feeling to the publication.

The process of selection was simple. Each editor would read a submission; if the work was deemed printable, the editor would then write down the title and the author's name on a sheet of paper. Once all the submissions were read, we compared our lists. If a work showed up on both lists, it was discussed and most often automatically admitted. If there was one particular work liked by one editor and disliked by the other, it would be discussed and reevaluated. By the end of the process, we had ten authors represented in prose, poetry, and fragments.

VI. Printing and Layout

Once the texts were selected and the authors notified, the problem of designing the layout for the magazine arose. Originally we had intended to pay Graphic Arts to design a layout, but in the end we decided against it. Instead, I contacted a friend of mine in the Graphic Design program who also works in the Media Arts Studio in the library. He agreed to guide me through the InDesign desktop publishing program so I could complete the layout on my own.

Over the course of a week in April, I spent at least an hour a day arranging the texts, scanning in pictures for the cover art, and editing the works so that they would fit the desired format. Considering that I had little to no experience with either InDesign or Photoshop, which was required for the artwork and one set of poems, the task took a relatively short amount of time. By the end of the week, I had arranged all of the texts in a coherent order, designed the cover, and arranged that one set of poems would be printed in their original format.

While I was struggling with the layout, Jay was writing the introductions to accompany the author's works and the general magazine. Once I had these and the cover art in place, the magazine was ready to print.

For printing, I again contacted Jack Williams with Graphic Arts. He sat down with me, calculated another estimate, and assisted me in choosing the best paper quality and colors to fit our goal. We eventually decided on plain black and white copies, with the exception of one page, and a black and white cover on colored paper. The magazine was additionally bound with perfect binding, similar to a paperback book, with glue instead of staples holding the pages together. It took approximately one week to print four-hundred copies of the forty-three page magazine.

VII. Disrtibution

To circulate the magazine, we decided to simply set out stacks of fifteen to twenty copies in various areas around Knoxville. The sites of distribution included: the university English department, the university library, the art and architecture building, 11th Street Espresso House, the Golden Roast, the Disc Exchange, Barnes and Noble, Borders, Market Street Booksellers, McKay's, the Book Eddy, and Java. We placed contact information in case anyone would like to request more copies or information, and both Jay and I check on the various locations to redistribute copies if needed.

VIII. Conclusion and Future Intentions

Establishing and publishing the *Magpie* has been one of the best experiences of my life. Though it is obviously a very low-budget, low-key operation, this project has allowed me to do what I have wanted to do all my life: edit and publish good works of literature. It has also allowed me to express myself and my interests in a way which could never be conveyed through a paper or presentation. In addition, it has given me the opportunity to experience first-hand the effort, time, and creativity involved in publishing, something I had never quite conceived.

Our future intentions are to continue publishing the magazine, only this time to attempt to find some sort of sponsorship. During distribution, we are asking the businesses we patronize to consider advertising in the magazine. Through the money we receive, we would (hopefully) be able to publish the magazine again and charge money for each copy. Continuing this experience would allow both Jay and I to further pursue our love of writing and editing, while giving us yet more experience in dealing with the amateur publishing world.

Katie Burnett
1221 Laurel Ave. Apt. #5
Knoxville, Tn 37916

October 13, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

Along with two colleagues in the Honors Program of the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Jay Tucker and Ben Oyler, I am attempting to publish a small literary magazine, entitled *Magpie*. Although we are applying our venture towards a senior project all three of us must complete in order to graduate from the Honors Program, this is an endeavor we have been wanting to undertake for some time.

Our basic idea or theme for the magazine is to produce something that, unlike most other student-run literary publications, extends beyond the realm of academia and reaches out to the talent of amateur writers within the community. We feel that our university is not a separate entity in and of itself, but rather a large part of the community as a whole, and vice versa. With our magazine, we would attempt to represent this. Our hope would be to display the wealth of creative resources that exist within the Knoxville community, regardless of university association.

In addition, we would like to focus our attentions on the prose form, a genre which we feel is normally under-represented in most literary publications of this sort, which tend to lean more towards poetry. Further, our hope is to focus on the authors themselves, rather than individual works, publishing at least two pieces from each contributing author. Our ultimate goal in both aspects would be to produce a cohesive collection of solid literary work with some sort of thread, thematic or otherwise, to tie it all together. Naturally, we would be unable to exclusively publish prose, nor would we always have two works by each author; both elements would be dependent upon the submissions we receive. However, this is our ultimate goal or ideal.

Naturally, as with any undertaking of this sort, one runs into problems, namely with the logistics of printing and funding the publication. It is impossible to cover every sort of expense for such a project oneself, especially if no profit is to be expected, as with our magazine. It is for this reason that I and my colleagues are asking for support. We have spoken with Graphic Arts Services at the University of Tennessee, and they have given us the following estimate:

5 ½ x 8 ½ size sheets, 100 pages, 200 copies, black and white, perfect binding: **\$900**

Naturally we cannot know exactly how long our magazine will be at this point; however, Graphic Arts was able to tell us that with each additional 4 pages (inside), it would cost **8¢** or **\$16**

for all 200 copies.

I hope that you may be able to help us, and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Katie Burnett

**Senior Project
Approval & Completion Form**

To be submitted on the last day for providing the semester grades and forwarded to:

University Honors Program, F 101 Melrose Hall

Tel.: 974-7875

Fax: 974-4352

honors@utk.edu

Student

Name : Katie Burnett
Major : English - German
ID : 408-63-1526

E-mail : kburnet1@utk.edu
Phone : (615) 419-2109

Faculty

Name : Michael Knight
Discipline : Creative Writing
Rank : Associate Professor

E-mail : mknight@utk.edu
Phone : 4-6972

Project

Title : Magic Literary Magazine

Approval



I have reviewed this completed senior honors project with this student and certify that it is complete and commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in the field.



Based on its academic merits, I recommend that this project be digitally catalogued and archived by Hodges Library to make it widely available.



I recommend this project for an Award of Distinction.

Note: A small number of awards, including financial recognition, will be given at the UHP spring convocation.

[Signature]
Faculty Member's Signature

5/2/05
Date



Read, approved and recorded

University Honors Program

Date

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Student

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Faculty

Name : Michael Knight
Discipline : Creative Writing
Rank : Associate Professor

E-mail : kburnett1@utk.edu
Phone : (615) 419-2109

E-mail : mknight@utk.edu
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Title : Maggie Literary Magazine

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University Honors Program

Date

(November 2004)