

English was never my subject of choice. Looking back now as a Creative Writing major, I should have known all along that English would be the subject that would generate the most ability, creativity and thought throughout school. All throughout my educational career, English was the subject that I usually did the best in, but I showed the least interest.

I entered Hunter College assuming I would become a Psychology major, but the amount of science required intimidated me quickly. Lost and unsure of where my college career would take me, I spent my first three years fulfilling the General Requirements while I attempted to figure out what I should major in. In my third year, I didn't even know what I wanted to do for the semester. In the spring of 2005 I took the mandatory English 220 course with the wonderful professor Mills (for the record, I sincerely believe Jean Mills is a wonderful woman. If pressed I can name several professors that weren't so wonderful). While our course focused on the predictable such as Shakespeare, Milton and Dickinson, there were several great surprises such as Joyce Carol Oates and Virginia Woolf.

And then there was the story. It was "Sonny's Blues," by James Baldwin. The first time I read it, I was so intrigued in the way Baldwin was able to describe music that I couldn't believe that story was over so quickly. I felt as though Sonny was playing not for the approval of his older, nameless brother, but for me. Since the narrator was nameless, I envisioned myself as Sonny's older brother. Sonny confessed to be about his heroin use and made me understand why jazz was an important fragment of his shattered life. He was attempting to make me understand why he shouldn't be branded as a screw-

up or a junkie. And he made me believe it when he took me to the Jazz club in the village for the first time, proving to me that he had talent as well as an audience.

But there was something beyond Baldwin's obvious talent. There was his ability to produce suffering on paper. I had always believed that suffering is the cause of art and expression. Our expression is limited when we are in a happier state. However, when one is depressed there is an endless amount of description used to describe our state. I started to become fascinated with the man, who no doubt had to have suffered in order to understand and portray suffering.

After passing that class with an A and appearing on the Dean's List for the first time since my admission, for the next semester I decided I wanted to take more English classes to see if it was my calling. I purposely took African-American Narrative in hopes that I would become further exposed to Baldwin. It was in the class that I read Another Country, the book that permanently changed my life.

By this time I was briefly aware of Baldwin's personal life and although "Sonny's Blues" touched on the tragedy, Another Country sounded autobiographical. I was convinced that Rufus was an exaggerated version of Baldwin himself. Down on his luck after a failed relationship with the already fragile Leona, he goes into a further downward spiral after a failed attempt in seeking love through his best friend, Vivaldo. I wonder who inspired the character of Vivaldo and how important that person was to Baldwin. I say exaggerated only because while I don't know everything about Baldwin, and I have no proof Rufus is based on him, we know that Baldwin did not suffer the same fate as his failed mirror image.

What ultimately attracted me to the story was the realization that fiction can be exaggerated non-fiction. After passing that semester with the highest grades of my entire college career, it was a no-brainer that I should major in English.

Within time I read on my own Giovanni's Room as well as the short story, "Going To Meet The Man," But without "Sonny's Blues," my path to James Baldwin, as well as the realization that writing was my true passion, would have never occurred. "Sonny's Blues" has allowed me to understand that as long as you have had an experience, exceptional or mundane, with training and time you can write an amazing fiction story.

I am still interest in James Baldwin and I have recently bought Going To Meet The Man, an impulse purchase after buying textbooks at Shakespeare & Co. There are many lessons and moments I can take from Hunter College, but none will be as important as being introduced to James Baldwin.