

Brandi Ballard
Statement of Purpose

"it is never an easy decision or task
to write about one's emotional landscape."

-bell hooks¹

I never made a conscious decision to write about the internal. The raw language and compelling images that characterize my work stems from depth of emotion. I rely on scenes to propel my stories forward. The focus on scene development allows me to pursue both traditional narrative structures and more experimental forms. I enjoy experimenting with fragmentation as a way of breaking a story down and inviting the reader to fill in any gaps.

When I first started writing creative nonfiction, I was not aware of the genre, so much of my early work was memoir that I turned into fiction. When I discovered creative nonfiction at community college, I experienced a freedom from the artifice of my previous writing. I write creative nonfiction because of the way the reality inherent in the genre adds richness and depth to the story. Nonfiction is an ideal medium for exploring truth and memory, and the way the two are complicated by perspective. The casting of author as character gives the reader a sense of connection and electrifies the work.

My work is courageous in the way it addresses taboo topics like depression, eating disorders, and HIV/AIDS. bell hooks is correct when she says it is not an easy task to write about the internal emotional. These subjects have chosen me but, at the same time, I had to decide if I was willing to write about them. I learned to accept the vulnerable position that comes with

¹ hooks, bell. *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life*. New York, NY: Owl Books, 1999. xxi. Print.

fearless expression. bell hooks, Louise DeSalvo, Martín Espada, and Suheir Hammad taught me to be daring. I draw inspiration from the way they write about the emotional without making judgment statements or overtly telling the reader what she should think and feel. By using exposition instead of emotional declarations, these authors create a space in which the reader can interact and derive meaning from the text. This is a skill that I have adopted in my own writing.

At this point in my writing career, I am ready to pursue novel length memoir projects. I have a piece that I am trying to expand into a longer work titled “Fat Girls Don’t Wear Sweatpants...Unless it Snows” (see writing sample). Also, I am committed to exploring subgenres of nonfiction that I am less familiar with, such as lyric essay and travel writing. Last summer, I took a trip to the Southwest where I saw a Zuni kachina ceremony. I want to explore this trip through the lens of travel writing. Your program will provide the support I need to pursue these projects. I am particularly interested your program because of the course offerings in literature. As an English Literature major and a writer, it is important to me to continue these studies. The critical lenses a diverse faculty, like that at USC, brings to a program is crucial to receiving a well-rounded education. In particular, I would like to take a course with Dr. Kwame Dawes because of his work on social justice issues such as HIV/AIDS. After graduation, I plan on teaching while working toward a Ph.D. in creative nonfiction.