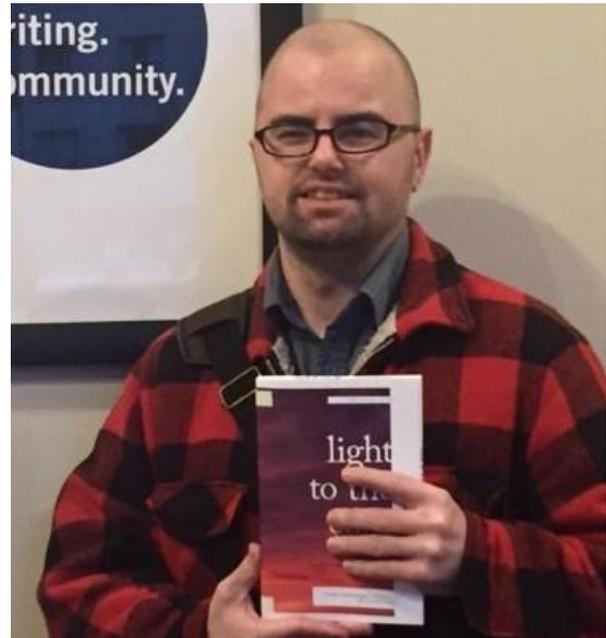


Featured Writer Interview with Chris Craig

Chris, 32, was born in Texas, but calls Oregon his home. He graduated from Wilson High School, attended PSU, and graduated two years ago with a Bachelor's in English. He is a teacher's assistant with Head Start, PPS, and is married with a 4-year-old son. He loves to write with what little time he has. He has always loved to write, but pushed it aside for his education, career and parenthood.

This past fall, Chris participated in a Write Around Portland workshop at Catholic Charities, Kateri Park/Esperanza Court for adults and teens living in low-income housing, refugee immigrants and women experiencing homelessness or in transition. The workshop helped to reignite Chris' interest in writing and encouraged him to write more regularly.



Excerpt from "Close Encounter of the Comical Kind"
by Chris Craig

A flash of light lit up the night sky like a Christmas tree, multicolored bulbs glistening in sequence. Darby held his hand against his forehead like the bill of a baseball hat to shield his eyes as he looked up, his inalienable curiosity overpowering his fear. A large dislike craft hovered above him, the size of which seemed to dwarf the moon.

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Interview with Featured Writer Chris Craig

Interviewer: Clayton Cooke, Write Around Portland intern fall 2016

How did you hear about the workshop?

It's hosted at the apartments I live in. My wife had gone to one the year prior. So, they sent a flyer around and I signed up. I had a great time. There is a lot to gain through the diversity of a workshop. It's a great eclectic group of perceptions and experiences from places everywhere, from all walks of life.

[Participants] come in, they get to be in the same room, you share with them, they share with you. It can be a really powerful thing, and if you want it to, it can be transforming.

Even just simple things [can be]. It can be for instance someone describes they're on the bus, they're going across the bridge, and they're looking at the river and they're describing what they see in a certain way. Maybe you hadn't looked at it that way before. And the next time you go across that bridge, you're going to think back and

you're going to look at it that way. And you're going to take it further, because that's going to stay with you and it's going to change and you're never going to see it the same way again, it's always going to be different. I just think that's really powerful.

Since the workshop was held where you live, did it help you to form connections with people that you would have otherwise not had a connection with?

It did. It's the holidays and everything, but I'm in talks with some of the people from the class and they want to keep meeting up, sharing our writing, writing together. We had such a great time. We just clicked.

Would you recommend the workshop to others?

I would recommend it to anybody. Even if they had never picked up a pen and wrote. I would recommend it to them. Because, like I said, it's a transformative thing. No one's ever going to regret doing it. It allows you to open yourself up, and it's just an amazing experience. I would recommend it to anyone.

Aside from writing what other ways did it impact you?

It was crazy how it worked out. We were a really tightly knit group. We were able to share things that maybe we wouldn't share, in groups like that. I shared a lot of things I wouldn't normally share. We really got to know each other on a more personal level. We learned about each other's lives, and what was going on with us as individuals. I talked with several people.

Like this one guy, he was a veteran of war, and you know, I had never been to war before. I was really interested to know what that experience is like. I wanted to see it through his eyes. I wanted to visualize it. It actually inspired me to write a war time story. It was great to talk with somebody about an experience, and then to translate it through my own writing.

Do you feel you have a new found focus? Did the workshop inspire a new discipline?

Before I started working, before I started college, I was working on a series of poems about my brother's death. Then during the workshop, my father passed. The workshop helped me to realize I needed to go back to those poems about my brother.

Was there a [writing] prompt that stood out to you?

Yeah the one that started "We don't do that here..." There are so many contexts that can be given to that. It doesn't even have to be some bad thing that you don't do. It could be some silly thing, like a switch of the norm, a twist.

You work with Head Start. Did the workshop give you any tools that helped you with that professional aspect of your life?

I was able to engage in this workshop with people in an open manner. I have actually been able to bring that to my work. I am able to engage more with my co-workers and my students as well. Not just in talking with them, but also in being there, in the moment. Being present.

Have you found any of the elements of the workshop help you with the challenges of parenthood?

Yeah, you know, being a parent, you are often frustrated. I find that my frustration is often inspiring. I can write about my frustrations and get them out that way. One day, before the workshop, I was stumbling around my

place, and I kept stepping on my son's toys. It was frustrating. So then, when I went to the workshop, I started writing about stepping on my son's toys. I wrote a poem that was kind of funny.

Is there anything else you would like to share about the workshop?

I'm going to take the workshop again, and I have been thinking about taking the steps needed to volunteer my time to work towards leading a workshop.