

To: Dr. Regina Braker, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

From: Dr. Jodi Varon, Professor of English

Subject: Sabbatical Report for 2014-15

Date: October 2, 2015

The following is an annotated chronological list of the projects and activities I performed during my sabbatical of 2014-15 in order to accomplish my sabbatical objectives. My initial statement of purpose read:

I am requesting funds for a sabbatical during the academic year 2014-15 in order to complete my manuscript, *Who Was Esta Platt*, a creative nonfiction exploration of the intersections of history, memory, memorial sites, family, and the Holocaust.

Though I changed the title of my manuscript-in-progress to *The War Inside My Head*, I accomplished the completion of the rough draft using the tools of archival research, travel, interviews, the writing process, and professional readings, lectures, and appearances. I also deepened my understanding of pedagogy and discourse with students with regards to approaching multicultural and multi-genre writing, both my own and by other writers, by presenting an intensive, seven-week compact seminar on nostalgia, irony, and ironic nostalgia, "Compact Seminar: American Nostalgias: Archetypal Themes in American Culture and Literature" at the Ludwigsburg University of Education, Ludwigsburg, Germany, as well as a seminar on multi-genre work, "Architecture of the Unknown" during the summer 2015 Low Residency MFA at EOU in June 2015.

Summer 2014 I began my sabbatical by organizing, hosting, and participating in all events supporting the inaugural EOU Low Residency MFA program, June 2014.

Summer 2014 I was a featured Writer-in-Residence for the Signal Fire Wide Open Studios, August 2014, participating in a short back-packing trip with Signal Fire faculty and students near the confluence of Granite Creek and the North Fork of the John Day River. I was an invited guest because of my profile as a writer and because of my writing about the area, especially with regards to the historical Chinese presence in Eastern Oregon.

Summer 2014 I appeared on a double playbill along with David Axelrod as a visiting writer at the Windfall Reading Series at the Eugene Public Library in Eugene, Oregon, during which I read from my manuscript in progress, *The War Inside My Head*, and answered questions during the following Q and A after the event.

October-December 2014 I facilitated the intensive compact seminar course "Compact Seminar: American Nostalgias: Archetypal Themes in American Culture and Literature" at the Ludwigsburg University of Education, Ludwigsburg, Germany. The course provided me with

discursive tools with which to approach cultural topics and imperatives that don't necessarily translate to other cultures. The course was an enjoyable challenge.

October-December 2014 I met with Jochen Faber on several occasions to learn about his roles as the organizer for Holocaust-related memorials and education-related initiatives in Ludwigsburg, first as an invited guest to attend the Stolpersteine Initiative group meeting on November 3, 2014 in Ludwigsburg along with other initiative members Walter Mügler, Andreas Nothardt, and Christian Rehmenklau. On subsequent meetings with Jochen Faber, I met to conduct interviews about his role as an executive board member for the Friends of Synagogenplatz Ludwigsburg memorial renovation (see overview of project at www.synagogenplatz.de) as well as to learn about the construction of his documentary (interviews November 26, 2014 and December 10, 2014) *The Secret of the Orange Boxes: Ludwigsburg and the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes* and his 2010 compendium *Stolpersteine in Ludwigsburg: Zu Besuch bei Verfolgten Nachbarn*. He was an amazing resource for me.

December 7, 2014 met with Christoph and Heide Brudi to learn more about artist Walter Brudi, who, during his early career, worked as a Kriegsmaler during WWII in Ukraine.

December 14, 2014 I met with the director of the Center for the History of the Jewish People, Dr. Yochai Ben-Ghedalia at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and worked with archivist Josef Gelston to navigate the dated and somewhat chaotic card-catalogues and microfilm collection for the ephemera from the province of Volhynia, now in Ukraine. Mr. Gelston provided translation support and suggested several ways to broaden my search that, while exciting, ultimately proved inconclusive.

December 15, 2014 I searched for data about the citizens of Ratne/Ratno with the help of archivists at the Yad Vashem Library in Jerusalem as well as interviewing French Holocaust survivor Claudine Schwartz-Rudel at Yad Vashem.

December 17, 2014, I met with David Mevorah, principal curator at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem to learn about his compilation and chief curatorial role in the Herod exhibit then on display, "Herod the Great: The King's Final Journey." The discussion of the interpretation of ephemera from antiquity, especially a well-preserved nautical knot and urns of anchovy paste and figs from Spain, and a conversation about the meaning of such ephemera for a contemporary audience, were valuable to my thinking about the inter-war years ephemera I viewed in the collection at the Center for the History of the Jewish People, as it calls into question the intersection of myth and history, and tangible data.

January 5-30, 2015 I spent the month as a reader at the British Library, reading throughout the Yizkor Book Collection of destroyed communities throughout Eastern Europe as well as looking for primary and secondary documents, books and articles about 20th century Eastern Europe in English, Ukrainian, and Russian. I also worked at The Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, also in London.

January 15, 2015 I interviewed a featured guest at the rededication of the Synagogenplatz memorial in Ludwigsburg (November 2014), Harry Grenville, the sole survivor of his family from Ludwigsburg. Mr. Grenville is a survivor of the Kindertransport from Ludwigsburg to Cornwall in 1939. Mr. Grenville, also known as Heinz Greilsamer while a citizen of Germany, resides in Dorchester, UK, where our interview took place. His memories of growing up in Ludwigsburg are central to one of the chapters in my manuscript, and, as with much about my contacts while in Germany, I'm grateful to Jochen Faber for helping to arrange my contact and subsequent interview with Mr. Grenville.

February-September, 2015 I worked to secure defined MFA administrative roles for myself and David Axelrod and met with the dean, provost, union representatives, and others in order to provide a firm foundation for good relationships between MFA faculty and the Dean's office as well as to clarify instructional and administrative load issues for myself during AY 2015-16.

April 21-May 6, 2015 I met with librarian Vincent E. Slatt in order to search archives at the Holocaust Museum Library and Archives in Washington, DC, including the oral testimony interviews from the Shoah Foundation archived at the Holocaust Museum.

April 29, 2015 I met with Joseph Bednarek, Program Officer for Europe and Eurasia at Global Fund for Children, Washington, DC, to learn about his travel in Ukraine and access to archives in Lviv and Kovel, Ukraine.

June 15-27 I facilitated the multi-genre craft seminar (WR 542/642) during the low-residency MFA at EOU, "Architecture of the Unknown," incorporating readings along with my deepened understanding of interview and research tools available and necessary for writers of both creative and scholarly work.

June 2015 I gave a reading during the low-residency MFA at EOU from my manuscript-in-progress, *The War Inside My Head*.

June-July 2015 and throughout my sabbatical year, I worked with Theresa Hamman, student editor for *Oregon East*, on instruction for building a student literary magazine, as well as proofreading and design error details for the student publication *Oregon East* throughout June and July.

July-October, 2015, I engaged in more manuscript shaping and the implementation of MFA duties in preparation for the October 2015 residency, as well as compiling manuscripts and editing the work of Sandra Dal Poggetto for the next issue of *basalt*.

The state of my manuscript as of today: 517 pages that are in the process of being trimmed and polished. Throughout fall term 2015, after the MFA residency ends, I will isolate and polish chapters one through three to submit to print and online journals for possible publication.

Thank you very much for the opportunities provided to me by my sabbatical.