A long journey to home at Truman

Truman professor draws on colorful background, love of teaching to enchant students

Loretta Palmer
Staff Reporter

Selling his van earned Mark Spitzer $600 in 1993. However, the experiences the money helped create have endured the test of time. Spitzer, assistant professor of English, took the money and flew to France. He worked and lived at a bookstore in the middle of Paris translating French poetry for two and a half years in an office full of spiders and cobwebs underneath a bookstore in the catacombs of Paris.

Spitzer had never taken a French class before making this journey. Instead, Spitzer said he decided to learn French by translating a 20-page poem by French poet Jean Genet during his time at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Spitzer, now in his third year of teaching at Truman, said he tries to impress upon his students the importance of their work in college.

"College work is really important, it's the most important thing you can do," Spitzer said. "It's more important than going to the keg or meeting your pals. If you have to stay up all night to get your paper done, that is what you should do. It will pay off in the end."

After his experience in Paris, he made his way back to Colorado, where he had a job landscaping. At this time, he decided to return to college at the University of Colorado-Boulder to earn his bachelor's degree in English and creative writing. However, Spitzer said he then changed his mind and decided to attend Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge, where he went on to receive a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing from Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge.

Spitzer said his experiences have given him a pretty dose of real life in Paris, so this portion of his life was a change.

"I was managing to pay off my student loans, but I was tired of digging in the dirt," Spitzer said. "I didn't see myself digging myself out of the hole I was digging. I made the decision to leave the real world, and go back to the fake world again."

While at LSU, Spitzer met his future wife, Robin Becker, in a poetry class. Spitzer and Becker married in 2002, and both now teach English at Truman. Spitzer said he enjoys Kirksville for a variety of reasons, but one in particular stands out above the rest.

An avid angler, Spitzer said he loves the fishing environment in Kirksville. During the summer Spitzer fishes daily either at Hazel Creek or Forest Lake. His love for fishing is apparent in his novel "Bottom Feeder," which was published in 1999. Spitzer always has enjoyed writing, and said he thinks it is an opportunity for people to work on projects that are important to them.

"I think that [writing is] something of the utmost importance in life," Spitzer said. "I look forward to going to bed so that I can get up and write in the morning."

Some students say his passion for writing and encouraging topics in some of his classes, like his "Nonfiction Creative Writing: Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll" class, make his classes engaging and enjoyable. Spitzer said he feels the pleasure of passing on knowledge to the next generation.

"It's so rewarding to publish your own work even if you don't think it's good," Spitzer said. "Spitzer's laid-back personality prompts students to talk to him on a more personal level, she said.

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