

Former rebel aspires to learn

Middle-aged, formerly homeless student uses experience in school

Alicia Collins
Staff Reporter

Senior Austin Roewe is a nontraditional student in every sense of the word.

He was homeless for the majority of a 15-year span after dropping out of high school on his 16th birthday. Roewe is now 37 years old and will graduate in December.

"I dropped out because I hated school for the most part," he said. "I thought it was more of a tool for socialization than for acquiring knowledge."

Roewe said that before he dropped out of school, he was expelled in seventh and eighth grades but made significant progress during his freshman year of high school.

"I was a serious rebel from the time I was 12 on, but since I happened to be a ward of the state and in a group home in Columbia, dropping out just seemed to be the natural progression," he said.

After Roewe dropped out, his father would not allow him to live at home, so after unsuccessful

attempts to live with his mother, he ended up between homes, Roewe said.

"I squatted a vacant dormitory at Stephens College for a couple months," he said. "After that I went on the road for a while, traveling to Boulder, Colo., where I camped out around the city."

Roewe said he spent the next 15 years doing random jobs and staying anywhere he could. From 16 to 22, he worked seasonally on his father's farm, and between 23 and 30 he lived in California, Hawaii, New Mexico, Oregon, Missouri and all points in between.

"I had reached a low point in my life, ... decided that I might as well do whatever I wanted or was afraid to do, even if it killed me," he said. "In short, I've hitchhiked through at least 40 states, ridden over 6,000 miles on freight trains and lived for short periods hoveled on the streets of major cities in the U.S."

Roewe said he owes a lot

to his family and he probably would not have gotten this far without them.

"I think most people who have lived the life I have either die doing it, end up in prison or are so hopelessly down and out on drugs and alcohol that they never return to anything that offers success," he said.

He was given the opportunity in 2001 to enroll in a Vocational Rehabilitation program, which aids people who are not meeting their employment potential. Roewe said he then attended Moberly Area Community College for two years before transferring to Truman.

"Without this assistance I never would have developed a desire to excel in academics," he said. "I originally wanted to teach, possibly at the college level. ... I just know that I want to help make the world a better place."

Roewe said he now runs a fencing business out of his home and also helps with his father's farm.

"Austin is the most intriguing person I've ever met. You just can't compare him to anyone."

Nicki Hammond
Kirkville Resident



Courtney Robbins/Index

Senior Austin Roewe sits in his French class Monday afternoon. He said he plans to graduate in December after many life challenges. He said he has hitchhiked through at least 40 states, ridden more than 6,000 miles on freight trains and lived on the streets of major U.S. cities.

He said he thinks the University community is accepting, despite his nontraditional status.

"Some people are a little uncomfortable with it, but I feel I have a lot to offer, and I think people appreciate a different point of view from their own," he said.

Roewe said his family has helped him tremendously, but Barbara Price, associate professor of English education, has inspired him to become a teacher as well.

"One of the things that impresses me about Austin is how willing he is to examine him-

self, to examine his work and just the effort he is willing to expend to improve the quality of his work," Price said. "He takes suggestion and criticism very well and is very diligent in applying the suggestions to his work."

Roewe was a member of her American Literature course, and his presence was noticed among all the students, Price said.

"He brought a welcome perspective to my lit class," she said. "... He brought a different way of seeing things that was formed by the things he has experienced in his life."

Roewe said another important aspect of his life right now is his girlfriend of nearly a year, Nicki Hammond.

"Austin is the most intriguing person I've ever met," Hammond said. "You just can't compare anyone to him."

Hammond said she thinks everything Roewe has gone through has made him a stronger person.

"He's resilient," she said. "... Austin can see things in everyday life for what they are because he has a deeper understanding of his surroundings than the average person."

Students and faculty will converse at an annual dinner

Roger Meissen
Design Editor

Students will chew on ideas over Sodexo catering next Monday.

Professors and students will hash out topics ranging from ethics to Jayhawk fan angst during the Night of Great Conversations on Monday.

The activity is free to students and provides them with an opportunity to interact with professors outside the classroom, said Marty Eisenberg, associate vice president for academic affairs and dean of the Residential College Program, which sponsors the event.

"The point of any great conversation is to create an opportunity for students, faculty and staff to interact in a less formal, more casual way than the traditional classroom," Eisenberg said. "The logic is that we have a great deal of difficulty sitting down and talking with people when we just throw people together, when we don't have something in common. The question, idea or topic for a conversation at least gives a starting point that for a group of individuals that don't know each other."

David Gillette, professor of economics, said he thinks the event enriches students.

"They seem very appreciative

to sit down and just have a discussion," Gillette said. "This venue of having dinner with a professor provides them the opportunity to do that."

Senior Robert Kelchen said that Monday will be the third time he has attended Great Conversations. The topic he will attend is, "Are Truman students overworked, or is that the price they pay for a quality education?"

"I usually go for something I have a feeling about, but this semester I wanted

to focus on this topic because I'm chairing the vision committee of Student Senate and want to get a feeling about what other students think," Kelchen said.

The event exposes students to a different side of professors they normally might not see in the classroom, Eisenberg said.

"I think one of the benefits of it allows students to see faculty beyond the narrow bands that

they see faculty in and learn about some of those broader interests that they have," Eisenberg said.

Students enjoy this opportunity to interact outside of their normal acquaintances, Kelchen said.

"It's nice to have a longer conversation about an issue that you really wouldn't have time for in the classroom," Kelchen said. "A lot of these people I never would have met otherwise because they're freshmen and sophomores."

Topics for these conversations are generated jointly by professors, students and RCP, Eisenberg said.

"After a Great Conversation, I'll generally e-mail all the student participants and ask them to tell me what faculty they'd like to see at a Great Conversation, would they like to have a meal with and if they have any questions or topics they'd like to see," Eisenberg said. "I can tell you that over the years that just because there's demand for a topic one year doesn't mean there will be demand the next time."

Gillette said this activity does not take away from students' time.

"I mean, they all have to eat dinner so it's really not extra time out of their schedule," he said.

"It's nice to have a longer conversation about an issue."

Robert Kelchen
Senior

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Announcement: Monday Night Football Special. Dirty Things Laundry. 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Buy one wash, get one free. Located behind Patty's Bookstore.

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Announcement: Miss your mom and your laundry service? Try Dirty Things Drop Off Service. Dirty Things Laundry Lounge. 105 E. Filmore (Behind Patty's Bookstore).

Announcement: Kirkville Dharma. Buddhist interest, discussion and meditation group. Meet people. Find peace. Connect with spirituality. All denominations welcome. 8 p.m. Sundays at 501 S. Haliburton. Contact Marc Rice at mrice@truman.edu.

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