

8-18-2023

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### **Recommended Citation**

(2023) "Diane and Marlisa Digress[ed]: An Interview Exerpt," *Digressions: Literary & Art Journal*: Vol. 20, Article 3.

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/digressions/vol20/iss1/3>

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# Diane and Marlisa Digress(ed): An Interview Excerpt

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Digressions*, this year's team [MD] interviewed the very first faculty advisor to the journal, Dr. Marlisa Santos [MS], as well as the very first student editor, Diane Joy Obregon [DJO]. In the interview, Diane and Dr. Santos talk about their experiences working on the journal, the journal's origins, where its title came from, and what the early submission process looked like (among other important topics). The following is a brief excerpt from that interview. You can listen to the full episode on the official channel for The Writer's Edge podcast using the QR code below.



**MD:** ...that's exactly where I was going to go with my next question, Marlisa. You talked about the term "literary magazine" but I'm wondering if you could talk about the name *Digressions*? What was the fuel behind settling on this particular title for what was then a literary magazine?

**MS:** Diane is going to talk about that because that was a decision of the students. We said that we're going to have a literary magazine. I was pretty new to Nova at that point—I was only there a couple of years—and I asked one of our more senior faculty members, Dr. Suzanne Ferris, "don't we have a literary magazine?" And she said, "well, we kind of had something like it in the past but we don't have it now." And I said that "we had to have one, especially since we were going to start an English major." We had to do this. I was once the undergraduate editor of my college's literary magazine, so I specifically had a real passion for it, and I thought we really had to have one. The first thing the students themselves decided on was what it was going to be called. Diane can definitely talk about that.

**DJO:** I'm going to actually read a paragraph from the "Editor's Note" that I wrote for [the first issue]:

...We asked for digressions. We encouraged students to take a break from 'Works Cited' and turn inwardly to work sighted. We suggested a pause in studying for exams to engage in self examination. Where do you digress? What are your thoughts apart from the expected academic focus of your life? It is surely not the flyers we passed out that prompted these carefully crafted creations but rather the irrepressible human desire to give voice to inner mono-

logue, bring ink to inspiration and deliver isolated thoughts to the unlimited plane of communication. (King, 2004)

It's really funny to read your own writing decades later, but I really felt passionately that way, and there were four of us involved in reading student submissions. I'm just going to include [the students'] first names since they're not here to speak for themselves. It was Amanda, Kenny, Liz, and myself, and we were under a lot of pressure to do a lot of reading...but we all wanted to do this, so it was kind of like an acknowledgment of that compromise where you're really trying to mold yourself and save yourself by what you're doing in your program, and it's very deliberate, and it's very much a deliberate construction of identity, and the idea of saying, "hey, tell us about you. Tell us about your life...what are you learning about yourself?"

In our literary classes, we would often digress because we would be comparing...learning [about] universal truths in the literature. Metaphors, allegory, allusion. These things that we studied in literature, even if it was in film... [you] have a dialogue or a monologue in your head, engaging with the materials. And so digressions was a way of saying, we know we never get to talk about this stuff in class. We know you don't get to express these discoveries that you're making about yourself, and that is absolutely part of the process, while you're getting your education. You're making all these discoveries about who you are in relation to a world that's being presented to you...So that's where the title comes from, and...it really means something to me that it's still there.

—[...]

**MD:** That's amazing. One of the other things that I often wondered about was the [journal's] masthead: "Imagine, Create, Inspire." I've often wondered where that came from and, I'm curious, because I don't know if this masthead came after the fact, did either of you have a role in institutionalizing that slogan for the journal? And, if so, where did it come from?

**MS:** ...Diane correct me if my memory is not right [but the masthead] was not [in] the first issue. It was the second or third, though. It was very early on. I think that there was a desire for all of us—the faculty and the students—that when you're beginning something like this, obviously the title is important. But as with many things at NSU, you have to begin your own traditions. And so we thought about how you do that. How do you begin a tradition? How do you make something that is going to last and evolve, and so forth? So the title of the journal was one thing, the cover is another thing.

If you look at the early covers after the first one, we wanted to standardized the cover, which may seem a little mechanical now, but we wanted to create...I hate this term but I'm using it anyway, we wanted to create a brand for *Digressions* because we wanted it to be recognizable. Once it became a thing, we wanted people to recognize what it was...so you need a masthead...you need some kind of vision or guiding principle. And so ["Imagine, Create, Inspire"] was part of that push to have something that would begin to establish the magazine as a thing ...What I really loved about it is that it really represents all the phases of the creative process. Past, present, and future. Imagining the root, creating in the present, inspiring for the future, and I think for *Digressions* there is not a better message.

**MD:** That is really helpful and I'm so happy that you were able to answer that question and share that with us. It's so funny because I, too, resist the terminology [associated with] developing a brand. The irony here, Marlisa, is that it worked! We're twenty years in! Clearly, brand development and brand equity worked somewhere along the lines.

— [...] —

King, D.J. (2004). Editor's note. *Digressions: Literary Magazine*, 1(1), p. 7.