

My Mentorship with Anna Chatterton **Danielle La Valle**

My story “Rabbit Fur Vest” began in staccato bullet points that I typed one-fingered into the notes app on my phone during my long early morning train commute.

I had been doing this for years, saving fragments of stories and poems in this way. but why would this time be different? By chance I discovered the 2024-2025 Mabel Pugh Taylor Writer in Residence, Anna Chatterton, while looking for upcoming workshops at HPL. I saw that you could schedule a one-on-one meeting. I immediately felt too shy and then thought, *well even if I go through with it what will a meeting do anyways?*

It is impossible to know how one or two small steps can lead to greater steps that become confident strides that become what feels like running through an endless field (What a really *really* good day of non-stop writing feels like!). I had recently been accepted into the Humber Creative Writing Graduate program. This should have been cause for celebration but in truth I felt numb. Should I be happy? Should I feel nervous, scared even?

Writing was something that I had been doing since I was a child. I had picked it up and put it down so many times in my life. I occasionally went through bursts of publications in small magazines only to return to the empty drudgery of my day-to-day to life. Why would *now* be the time that I seriously committed to it and didn’t look back?

This is where having a mentor changes everything. Immediately after meeting Anna I felt different. She looked at me and said, “You *are* a writer”. This is vastly

different than someone saying that your writing is good. I was given permission to be or rather, what I had always been finally allowed to shine through.

Anna taught me that writing is community. It may seem counter-intuitive, I mean shouldn't you lock yourself in a bell-tower or something if you want to write a novel? But no, by meeting other writers and forming meaningful connections with them you learn more about the work and about yourself. Writing can enrich your life by connecting you with a variety of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Through Anna's generosity of spirit and quick resourceful thinking, I am now part of a wonderful writing group at Central (we are still workshopping a name). I moved to Hamilton two and a half years ago and for the first time I feel like I have made genuine and lasting connections here.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly Anna helped me to find my confidence as a writer. Things that were once unthinkable, public speaking, turning a short story into a novel, now seem not only doable but extremely fun and liberating.

"Rabbit Fur Vest" is currently being expanded into a novel. Thank you, Anna, for helping me to find the confidence and the resources to undertake this project!