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Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication Alumni Association



GAYLORD ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

“The creative industry is really difficult to break into, and a lot of it is sticking to your guns.”

JOHN PAUL BRAMMER

Writer, *them*.
New York, NY

Maybe you’ve seen John Paul Brammer on Twitter. Perhaps you’ve read his “Hola Papi!” LGBT advice column or seen his byline at *The Guardian* or BuzzFeed. But before he made a name for himself as a writer in New York—now on staff at Condé Nast’s *them*.—he walked the halls of Gaylord College. A 2013 professional writing graduate, John Paul has recently been published in a high-profile anthology, “How I Resist,” alongside such prominent voices as author Jodi Picoult, Hamilton star Javier Muñoz, illustrator Jonny Sun, and actress Rosie O’Donnell. We spoke with him about his time at OU and his burgeoning writing career.

What is your favorite memory from your time at Gaylord College?

My favorite memory was at the end of our “writing the novel” course when we were all trying to wrap up our books. Some of us didn’t have our endings figured out yet, so we brainstormed together. There was a lot going on. One student had to have her protagonist, who had no skills whatsoever, somehow take down an evil world leader in the last chapter. Another had to kill a

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

Oof. I have some moments I hold close to my heart, and what’s funny is it’s commensurate with experience. Things I was ecstatic about when I was blogging in DC, like my work being shared by a high profile person online, have become part of the business now. Being a creative, you always feel like you’re trying to make it out of the woods. You feel like you have to work extra hard, meet all the right people, bag all the right bylines, and the industry is so turbulent that sometimes you don’t even know if you’ll have a job tomorrow. Being a writer maybe never stops being this intangible thing. Like, I was writing columns for *The Guardian*, and I never thought, “I am a writer.” I thought, “this will help me on my way to being a writer.” It wasn’t until very recently that I let myself think, “We’re going to be OK. Something bad could happen, and we’ll still be OK.” I still have anxiety though.

So I guess some significant moments on that road are ones like getting my first blogging job. That set everything off for sure. Another

beloved horse at the end of her romance novel. We were throwing out the most wild suggestions and dying laughing. We landed on a herd of wild, rabid hogs stampeding the ranch and killing the horse, but then we used that ending for all the novels. The mermaid novel ended with a stampede of wild, rabid hogs, and so did the novel about a journalist trying to get her first big scoop. My novel was about a Mariachi cyborg and I had mine plotted out from the jump, so sadly there were no hogs for me. But that day has stuck with me and sometimes when I can't finish off an essay, I think of adding hogs.

Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member from Gaylord?

I really like Mel Odom. He's bonkers, but in a good way. I remember our first day of "writing the novel," he called himself "an information ferret," and that has stuck with me over the years. Imagine an information ferret. It's funny! But we were allowed to be as creative as we wanted to be and he stuck with me and my novel idea that was from way out of left field, and I really appreciate that. The creative industry is really difficult to break into, and a lot of it is sticking to your guns. I think I needed someone from a place of authority to let me know I was allowed to be outside the box.

How did your career path lead you to them.?

I could lie and say I planned it, but the truth is it's hard for me to piece it all together even in retrospect. I went from a bookstore in Oklahoma City to a small media startup in DC which later moved me to New York, to then writing columns for *The Guardian* to then working at NBC News. This was all within the span of three years or so, so it kind of gives me whiplash to think about, especially considering I'm very new at Condé Nast. I work in the World Trade Center now, and before this I was at 30 Rockefeller Center. It's a lot for a guy from rural Oklahoma! But I think what's helped me is to think less about the company I'm working for and think more about making quality work, about what kind of creator I want to be. At the blogging site, I wanted to make things that were a cut above, and I found avenues to make things I could be proud of even if most of my work was 300-

would be when [I published an essay](#) in BuzzFeed in the wake of the Pulse Nightclub shooting. It was a memoir kind of piece, and that's the one that told me, based on the reaction it got, that there was room for me to write things I found beautiful and to write creatively and to have it be valid in an industry setting. That was pivotal for me. Earning the respect of my news editor at NBC, Brooke Sopelsa, helped me put away my imposter syndrome. I felt if she liked my work, and she's been through the wringer, that must mean something! Being published in a book with Jodi Picoult, whose work I admire. Just sort of inhabiting this world of talented writers I respect so deeply, being in their orbit. I don't think we should define ourselves by the approval of other people, but on the other hand some of these people I've been reading for years and for them to say they've read my stuff, well, I'd be lying if I said it doesn't make me feel good. Creating my advice column, "Hola Papi!" and fielding questions from LGBTQ people from all around the world, from people in India and Mexico and Nigeria, coming up with the name and an audience for it, that's been one of my pride and joys.

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in writing?

I want them to know it doesn't have to be as scary as some people make it out to be. Sure, there are scary aspects to it. I've encountered a lot of them, and I'm not in a place in my career where I can afford to stop taking advice from people who can help guide me through some of those things. I am still very vulnerable to a lot of the shocks and throes of this really precarious media world. But on the other hand, when I look back, I've been OK. I've met people who are there for me, and I am there for them, and there's a strong sense of community in this business I think. So my advice would be to first make sure this is what you really want to do, and if it is, trust your gut. Don't think too hard, especially not at first, about making it all happen right away. Pursue the things you like, the things that interest you, because you'll always be pleasantly surprised by how many people can relate. Don't think of human beings as a mere network. These are people who probably ended up where they are because of a lot of the same reasons as you. You have a lot in common. It makes

word quick hits that I wrote very quickly then sent out. Nothing wrong with that, of course! But I tailored my work to the kind of professional I hoped to be and ignored the noise. It's very flattering to have worked for the companies I've worked for. But I think it's important to remember who I am regardless of what building I'm in.

sense to get to know each other and develop real bonds. And then, of course, the bread and butter: Read! Write! Read! Write!

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I haven't been outside of work in a while! My anxiety pairs nicely with my belief that I have to be constantly proving myself. I write for work, then I go home and write for pleasure, and then I read. I like to draw a lot, though! I love to travel, and I love to cook and bake. The Great British Bake Off calms me down so sometimes I just watch old episodes on a loop and bake a cake or something. I do exercise but not because I like it so it doesn't count. My ideal day though is spent among friends, grabbing drinks, and talking about nothing.

***John Paul Brammer**, who graduated from the Professional Writing program at the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication in 2013, has recently been published in a high-profile anthology alongside such prominent voices as author Jodi Picoult, Hamilton star Javier Muñoz, illustrator Jonny Sun, and actress Rosie O'Donnell.*

"How I Resist," edited by bestselling author Maureen Johnson, is an "all-star collection of essays about activism and hope." It features an essay from Brammer, "Letter to a Sensitive Brown Queer," in letter format, in keeping with the theme of his popular LGBT advice column, "Hola Papi!"

Brammer, currently based in New York City, is writing his own solo book while working as a full-time writer at Condé Nast's website, "[them](#)." Brammer was previously working as an associate producer at NBC News, and has contributed at The Guardian, BuzzFeed, Slate and more.



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