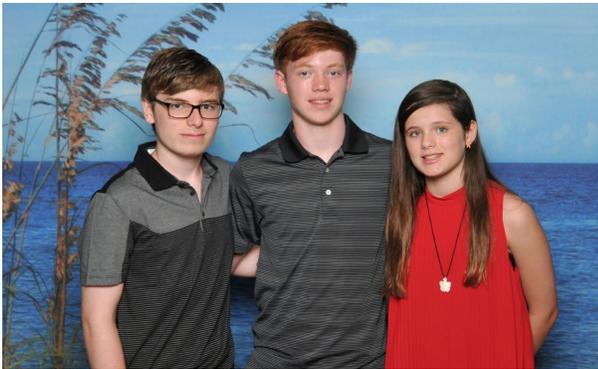


Raising Children, Writing Manuscripts

In addition to completing coursework, teaching undergraduates, editing *Glass Mountain*, working with WITS, volunteering in the community, studying for comps, dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, drafting stellar manuscripts, and worshipping Satan, a substantial contingent of students in the UH CWP graduate program are raising beautiful families of all ages and sizes. Since some of us struggle with putting our own pants on in the morning, we asked them for their secrets:



Barbara Drumheller (PhD, Fiction)

My life in graduate school with three kids and a part-time job (or now, instead of the job, a flood house) is like a triptych: thematically related, maybe even complementary, but split into three discrete wholes. I'm not organized enough to divide my time on any specific, recurring schedule, so this weekend I attended a twelve-year-old's birthday party on Friday night, woke up at six in the morning on Saturday to sort through random objects in the flood house, stopped to pick up a nosegay for my fifteen-year-old's Homecoming date, outlined some revision ideas for my book, ate lunch with my seventeen-year-old and my husband, talked to the contractor, read a few chapters for one of my classes, made some notes for workshop, and emailed my daughter's math teacher about her struggle with rational numbers. Then I walked the Chihuahua and shopped online for some furniture. So, with apologies to Harry Potter haters, in this triptych I mentioned I'm like one of those magical portrait subjects who can travel at will from painting to painting, lolling around in a meadow on the left hand panel, and then crossing a busy street in the middle panel and eating a merry repast at a pub on the right hand side. Everything different, everything important, everything more or less accomplished with more or less success, depending on the day.



Luisa Muradyan Tannahill (PhD, Poetry)

I spend most of my day with my baby and work during his naps. After "night night time," I typically spend 3-4 hours studying/writing/trying to stay awake. Since I am currently studying for exams, I have swapped out *Sesame Street* for the *Cambridge History of American Literature* during story time. Zaven often has insightful things to say about the text. When he spits up, I suspect he is showing his displeasure with the canon.



Robbie Howell (PhD, Fiction)

Neither the world nor my toddler really cares all that much if I write stories. The world would probably prefer me to sell medical tubing or something from a cubicle, and Adam just wants me to cut him up some grapes. This is nothing to be sad about, though. For me, at least, having a child has really raised the stakes for fiction. Boring stories seem even more boring now, and exciting stories seem like total miracles. I want to write the exciting ones, the maybe (gasp) miraculous ones, and if I can't, Adam is sitting in the next room waiting to jump up and down on my stomach. That's always fun.

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM



Chelsea Brennan Desautels (MFA, Poetry)

On a logistical level, we sprung for solid, full-time child care. Generally, that leaves me 9:00am-5:00pm of most working days to study/write/teach/grade/edit/etc. (It also means all that needs to get done during those hours.) But then June will get sick, and everything goes out the window. So, for me, that's the first part: (1) strict time management, coupled with (2) willingness to throw that out the window when your kid needs you.

But, of course, it's more than that. I heard a podcast with Rachel Zucker and Sarah Vap the other day. Sarah was explaining that she found motherhood opened up a new level of "susceptibility"—the gist (of part) of one of the poems is "I had a baby and then I suddenly had enemies." That rings true for me, and as I'm learning who I am as a writer, I'm realizing that right now, at least, I'm often asking, "Why is this world unsafe?" and "How much blame for that danger do I carry?" and "How should we live in the face of it?" I don't know what I'd be writing if it weren't for June.



Brenden Oliva (PhD, Fiction)

Time to work and especially time to write is never "sacred," at least not in Castle Oliva. So I just try to roll with it; when Ellie pops in she gets all my attention. Turn away from the screen, make eye contact, and actually listen. Honestly, most the time it's nothing critical. But showing that our relationship is more valuable than anything else? That's important. Well that and, you know, setting aside time to worship Satan as a family.



Jenny Staff-Johnson (MFA, Fiction)

I get my work done by putting off all but the most basic domestic tasks until things reach a state of near-emergency. Then I take a whole day or two away from reading and writing and knock it all out at once. And since I applied to the program under the erroneous impression I could go to class while my kids were at school, I also beg, plead, bribe and pay people to drive my kids home while I sit in a freezing room, quite happily, talking about literature.



Joshua Gottlieb-Miller (PhD, Poetry)

I write when Owen is in daycare or asleep. Sometimes that means sleeping less than I should. I read when I'm at the gym or biking, or Owen's asleep or playing nicely with his toys. I don't know what "keeping your writing time sacred" is. Parenting clarifies what your values are, and what's an important way to spend your time. But sometimes you just survive. I spend a lot of time thinking about what I need to read and write while I am not reading or writing. At least, it looks like thinking.

Should you have queries or wish to support the CWP: cwp@uh.edu