

Signature Works

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I. Critical Essay (ENGL Harlem Renaissance):

Title: Called Nowhere: Mobility, Discernment, and the Limits of Agency

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, published in 1928, is often interpreted through the "tragic Mulatta" archetype, emphasizing Helga Crane's rootlessness, biracial identity, and internal conflict. Critics have highlighted her mixed-race heritage, her struggles to belong in both Black and white communities, and the apparent inevitability of her isolation, casting her wandering as the hallmark of a conflicted, tragic figure. Building on this, Jeanne Scheper offers a different interpretation, situating Helga's mobility within a modernist framework of resistance. Scheper argues that Larsen employs Helga's acts of leaving and returning as a "strategy of resistance," using mobility to counter the social and geographic containment imposed upon her. While Scheper's analysis compellingly reframes Helga's movement as resistant, I argue that Helga's mobility is less a strategy of resistance and more a response to distorted calls that prevent authentic discernment: coercion masquerading as uplift, nostalgia disguised as belonging, enchantment mistaken for guidance, beauty framed as freedom, and exhaustion misrecognized as revelation. Larsen uses Helga's mobility not only to illustrate resistance but to expose how oppressive systems complicate the discernment of one's true vocation or place in the world.

Jeanne Scheper offers a reinterpretation of *Quicksand* by framing Helga Crane's mobility as modernist resistance. As Scheper notes, Larsen "opposes the containment of any given place" with mobility, defining Helga's departures not as failures but as "a strategy of resistance" (679). In this reading, Helga becomes "a modern flâneuse," her movements mapping the experience of Black women negotiating modernity. Mobility also reworks the "tragic mulatta" trope: instead of casting mixed-race identity as inevitable alienation, Scheper emphasizes the possibilities embedded in movement (685). Her "neither here nor there" status becomes, for Scheper, a space

of possibility that resists each community's constraints. As Helga moves through Naxos, Harlem, and Copenhagen, Scheper sees her unsettling the social scripts that attempt to confine her—whether the uplift ideology of Naxos, the respectability politics of Harlem, or the exoticizing gaze of Europe. While Scheper shows how mobility functions as agency, her focus on what Helga's movements resist leaves less room for why she moves. Examining the forces that compel Helga, the "calls," reveals mobility not only as resistance but as a fraught negotiation within oppressive systems.

Larsen situates Helga Crane's first crisis of discernment in what could be understood as coercion masquerading as uplift. At Naxos, disciplinary ideology is couched as a moral "calling." A white preacher praises Naxos as a place where Black students "knew what was expected of them" and "knew enough to stay in their places" (3). The imperative "stay in their places" exposes how uplift rhetoric reduces vocation to compliance. His final statement, that the students be "satisfied in the estate to which they had been called, hewers of wood and drawers of water," appropriates the language of calling and attaches it to inherited servitude (3). The word "estate" signals immobility rather than purpose, revealing the sermon as an anti-call that assigns a fixed position and names it divine order. Helga's bodily reaction underscores the falseness of this call. She experiences "a surge of hot anger and seething resentment," imagery of boiling that shows her body rejecting the message before she can articulate why (3). But the crowd's "considerable applause" immediately stifles her intuition, functioning as a communal counter-voice that isolates her dissent (3). What feels wrong to her is publicly ratified as right. Scheper helps illuminate this scene, noting that Naxos exemplifies "communities invested in various ideological constructions of race," and that Helga "could neither conform, nor be happy in her unconformity" (685). Yet while Scheper reads Helga's departure as resistant mobility, the

novel frames it as destabilized rather than empowered. Her emphatic “No, forever!” signals flight, but not clarity (3). Naxos exemplifies a call distorted by coercion, where mobility emerges not as resistance but as collapse under oppressive structures

If Naxos distorts vocation through coercion, Chicago reveals a different but equally destructive vacuum: the absence of any ground from which to discern a self. On arriving, Helga reflects that although she was “born in this dirty, mad, hurrying city,” she had “no home here” (27). These adjectives illustrate agitation, rather than origin, showing that birthplace, alone, is insufficient as a source of belonging. Even her uncle, “the one relative who thought kindly, or even calmly, of her,” is described in terms of tolerance, not affection (6). The encounter with Mrs. Nilssen enacts a more explicit dismantling of identity: when Helga introduces herself, Mrs. Nilssen counters, “He isn’t exactly your uncle, is he? Your mother wasn’t married, was she?” (28). The repetition of interrogatives verbally erases her kinship ties. Larsen shows the effect: she’s “pushed down to the uttermost depths of ignominy” (28). The metaphor of descent dramatizes the violence of being reclassified as illegitimate. Chicago does not misname calling as Naxos does; it denies Helga any name at all. It offers her no community, no interpretive ground, and no direction for resistance. Instead of the purposeful mobility Scheper describes, Helga enacts its collapse: movement emerging from a failure of discernment rather than the success of it. Mobility becomes compulsive rather than chosen, a symptom of a woman navigating competing racial, familial, and moral dislocations without a stable sense of call.

Harlem initially appears to repair the void left by Chicago. In contrast to the city that “had no home” for her, “teeming black Harlem... welcomed her and lulled her into something that was, she was certain, peace and contentment” (43). Larsen’s tonal shift, “welcomed, lulled, peace,” casts Harlem as a kind of communal embrace. Helga experiences a “magic sense of

having come home,” repeating the language of arrival that punctuated her earlier departures (43). Yet, Larsen’s diction is cautious: “magic and sense” both suggest an illusion, an atmosphere of enchantment rather than true grounding. Harlem’s call is affective, not moral; it soothes but does not orient. Helga mistakes this enchantment for a vocation. The pleasures of Harlem, “their elaborate parties,” “their sophisticated cynical talk,” the “unobtrusive correctness” of their clothes, gratify her long-frustrated aesthetic sensibilities (43). Yet her self-recognition is built on contrast rather than conviction. She delights that her New York friends “looked with contempt and scorn on Naxos,” giving her a “pleasant sense of avengement” (43). The phrase “pleasant sense” underscores that her newfound stability depends on negation—on Harlem mocking what once mocked her. Harlem’s call, enchanting but ultimately partial, illustrates how pleasure and social validation can masquerade as vocation while leaving the self unmoored.

Larsen’s close narration undermines the solidity of Helga’s Harlem identity. As spring arrives, she feels “shut in, trapped,” showing that Harlem’s call, based on novelty and enchantment, was never rooted (47). Dr. Anderson’s reappearance crystallizes this instability. When he tells her, “You’re still seeking for something,” the line punctures the illusion she has been maintaining, triggering the same “anger and defiant desire to hurt” seen at Naxos (50). In both cases, an external voice exposes the fragility of her interpretive ground. It is here that Scheper’s reading becomes most clear and most limited. Scheper reads Helga’s Harlem exit as a modernist strategy of mobility, emphasizing freedom in “different strange places” and pleasure in urban wandering (691). Yet Larsen complicates this vision: Harlem’s constraints, Anne’s rigid racial politics, the pressure to perform middle-class Black respectability, foreground confusion and inward fracture. Helga becomes “afraid... of herself,” recoils from “the sight of the grinning faces,” and finds that Anne’s presence “filled her with dismay” (47). She is suddenly unprotected

with no “where” to be. These reactions depict not resistance but unraveling. When Helga recalls Copenhagen with warmth, she misreads nostalgia as vocation, imagining purity, ease, and acceptance. The narrator calls these memories “fleeting,” signaling projection rather than truth. As in Chicago, the call is escape, not clarity. Across Harlem, Helga moves not from discernment but because each environment offers a distorted, partial, or counterfeit call.

Helga’s entry into Copenhagen initially seems like a long-imagined vocation—grounded in beauty, independence, and escape from racialization. On the ship, she “revel[s] like a released bird in her returned feeling of happiness and freedom, that blessed sense of belonging to herself alone” (64). The ‘released bird’ simile evokes Scheper’s idea of Helga’s expansive, unbounded mobility. Yet Larsen undercuts this optimism: a released bird is unclaimed, directionless, and ‘belonging to herself alone’ signals negation rather than purpose. Her effort to “put the past behind her with an ease which astonished even herself” carries the overdetermined “again,” suggesting repetition rather than change (64). Even before she arrives, Denmark marks another turn in a cycle of flight, not its break. Larsen uses sensory detail to dramatize the seduction of European cosmopolitanism. The sea is “smooth, like a length of watered silk,” a simile that turns nature into fabric and aligns the world with Helga’s hunger for “Things. Things. Things” (64, 67). Her “buoyant” steps mirror this desire: Copenhagen seems to promise a life curated through beauty (63). But this aesthetic abundance quickly becomes a form of containment. Helga’s success in Denmark depends on her being “exotic,” a quality that reduces her to “a decoration. A curio. A peacock” (73). The triplet, from adornment to collectible to display animal, undercuts Scheper’s claim that mobility grants resistance.

Clothing becomes a medium of exoticization: Fru Dahl insists on flamboyant fabrics, and Helga’s hesitant protest, “Isn’t it too gay? Too—too—outré,” shows her awareness that they

stage her racial difference, yet she capitulates (68). Alone, she consoles herself with the language of beauty, noting her “lovely shoulders,” showing how seduction substitutes for discernment. The dynamic mirrors Naxos inverted: where Naxos demanded erasure, Copenhagen demands display, using Helga’s body without understanding it. The dinner scene exposes this logic more starkly. Marie “cut down” the gown, leaving Helga “thankful for the barbaric bracelets” and “dangling ear-rings,” revealing the primitivist fantasy underwriting her success (70). The “murmur of wonder and admiration” that greets her is undercut by the reaction: they “felt no need for jealousy... She wasn’t one of them. She didn’t at all count” (70). Admiration becomes exclusion: Helga cannot be allowed to assimilate, as she is valuable only as decorative otherness.

The circus scene reveals the violence beneath this cosmopolitan veneer: when Black performers appear, Helga feels “shamed, betrayed,” and the crowd’s “howl[ing]” turns admiration into derision (83). The line between Helga and the performers is aesthetic: Denmark consumes Blackness in both refined and grotesque forms. Olsen’s desire to paint Helga crystallizes this racialized visual economy. His “stupendous arrogance” frames her not as a partner but as material for artistic self-aggrandizement (73). Helga recognizes the racializing logic: in her country, men of her race “don’t make such suggestions to decent girls” (86). His comments on marriage and her “broad nose” reduce her to experiment (87). Scheper’s claim that the mobility grants agency overlooks how Denmark merely repositions her in another system of aesthetic containment. This recognition reproduces the unrest familiar from Naxos and Harlem, “indefinite discontent,” “storms,” and “little mental insecurity,” showing how each environment distorts authentic discernment (81). Anne’s letter announcing marriage punctures Copenhagen’s decorative fantasy, reviving suppressed longings for connection and responsibility. Copenhagen, then, is not the site where mobility becomes a strategy of resistance, as Scheper suggests.

Copenhagen exposes mobility's vulnerability: each new place promises calling but delivers ornamentation, and escape masquerades as vocation without satisfying Helga's deeper needs.

Helga's collapse into the storefront church marks the novel's most devastating distortion of vocation. After her disastrous encounter with Anderson, she stumbles in "a dripping heap," nerves "torn" and body "cold," vulnerable to the congregation's cries—conversion arrives not as revelation but as atmosphere (111). Larsen renders her passive, giving herself to "soothing tears" before she understands, signaling a loss of agency (112). What masquerades as spiritual calling is, in fact, a coercive vulnerability—discernment overwhelmed by exhaustion. Her impulsive marriage to Pleasant Green emerges from this same vulnerability: framed as a solution to a void rather than somewhere she is "called." Even as she half-recognizes the danger ("It would be too awful"), her mind flickers toward submission: "It was a chance at stability... she meant to take" (117). Religion, rather than offering grounding, becomes the vehicle through which Helga mistakes desperation for calling.

Life in the rural South reveals the full consequences of this misdiscernment. Helga initially believes she has found "the intangible thing" she craved: "a house," "a garden," "a pig," and a faith that feels newly meaningful because it offers "an anæsthetic satisfaction for her senses" (120). Yet Larsen quickly exposes the hollowness of this domestic ideal. Night brings "a disturbing medley of feelings," a mixture of "anticipation" and "small fear," indicating that Helga senses that this version of religious domesticity rests on her erasure (120). Her pregnancies come with relentless speed: "three... within twenty months," their births accompanied by "horrible nausea," faintness, and the constant need to clutch "some convenient fence or tree" (123). The repetition of bodily weakness signals how the rural South scripts Black women's labor: fertility becomes expectation and a trap. Scheper's formulation that Helga is both

“agent and casualty” illuminates her actions but cannot account for the structures that define Black womanhood through piety, labor, and reproductive endurance (682). The rural South narrows her world to domestic survival, and Helga recognizes that religion has “masked suffering,” offering not liberation but anesthetic delay. Her desire for “freedom and cities... clothes and books” resurfaces, but exhaustion makes movement impossible (135). What Scheper interprets as resistant mobility is here inverted: the South is the first place Helga does not leave because she cannot. Mobility ends not in modernist *flânerie* but in vocational entrapment.

Helga Crane’s movements across Naxos, Chicago, Harlem, Copenhagen, and the rural South reveal a pattern more complex than resistance or rootlessness. In each place, Larsen shows the language of calling distorted by racial and gendered structures: choice emerges from misrecognition—coercion as uplift, nostalgia as belonging, enchantment mistaken for guidance, beauty as freedom, exhaustion as revelation. Scheper rightly emphasizes Helga’s mobility, but reading it chiefly as resistance overlooks that she moves because each place fails to provide the grounding necessary for discernment. Her departures arise from collapse, not clarity. By tracing how each environment offers a partial or counterfeit call, Larsen reframes mobility as the repeated effort to salvage meaning in structures that deny her full humanity. Helga’s tragedy is not that she belongs nowhere, but that she is never given the conditions under which belonging could be possible. Her final immobility in the rural South—exhausted, trapped, and unable to imagine departure—exposes the cost of this struggle. Quicksand ultimately shows that mobility cannot substitute for vocation: without a community that sustains discernment, Helga is called everywhere and nowhere, compelled to move but never permitted to arrive.

II. ENGL Major Author Seminar Paper:

Context:

- 24 page original scholarly work involving indepth analysis of some of Jane Austen's primary sources, a clear thesis, and review of academic secondary sources
- Multidisciplinary— using sociological concepts as analytical framework for analyzing Jane Austen's novels
- Research Question: In what ways do Elizabeth and Emma employ intellect, moral discernment, and social performance as alternative forms of agency and “capital” in systems that restrict women's economic and political autonomy?

Title: Feminine Capital and Ethical Agency in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*

In Regency-era England, women's lives were constrained by legal and social systems that limited independence and reinforced dependence on men. Marriage, while potentially elevating a woman's social position, legally subsumed her identity under her husband, and inheritance laws favored male heirs, tethering women's material security to marital prospects (Crawford 153; Bohang 219; “Fee Tail”; Crawford 156). Social expectations further constrained agency: accomplishments in music, language, or etiquette were valued less for personal enrichment than for enhancing marriageability, while intellectual engagement and assertiveness could undermine a woman's social acceptability (Gregory; Sutherland 214; Young 155). Within these restrictions, women's power often operated in subtle, socially sanctioned ways. Jane Austen's novels, particularly *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, illustrate how women navigated these constraints through what can be understood as “feminine capital”—the ethical, aesthetic, and social resources that enabled influence in a patriarchal society. Using Pierre Bourdieu's frameworks of cultural and social capital, this paper examines how Austen's heroines convert intellect, taste, wit, and social networks into forms of agency. Elizabeth Bennet exercises moral discernment to

assert autonomy and ethical judgment in her choices, while Emma Woodhouse learns to temper inherited social and cultural authority with humility and responsibility. Together, these novels demonstrate that female power in Austen's world is not solely a matter of wealth or status but of ethically grounded skill, strategic social insight, and cultivated taste.

I. Regency Constraints: Legal, Social, and Gendered Limits on Women

In the early nineteenth century, Regency-era England was governed by extremely rigid social and gender hierarchies that left women largely dependent on men for financial security and social legitimacy. Women's lives were circumscribed both legally and socially: while men could acquire status and independence through wealth and property, women were "confined... expected to marry young and prioritize childbearing" (Bohang 218). Marriage functioned as both a social necessity and a form of systemic oppression: it could elevate a woman's social position, yet legally, her identity and autonomy were effectively erased. Under the doctrine of coverture, "a husband and wife became one person, and that person was the husband" (Crawford 153). All of a woman's property and legal rights became her husband's, leaving married women unable to control their own assets, enter contracts, or pursue professional opportunities (Bohang 219). In this system, securing a favorable marriage was often less a matter of personal choice than a strategy for survival within a patriarchal society.

Legal dependence was reinforced by inheritance practices designed to keep wealth within male lines. Many estates were legally restricted so that property would pass to male heirs, leaving daughters without direct claims to family land or income ("Fee Tail"). While some arrangements theoretically allowed inheritance through the female line, in practice, women were excluded from ownership in most cases, reinforcing financial dependence and limiting social power (Crawford 156). These legal structures tied women's material security directly to marital

prospects, and marriage became a crucial arena in which women negotiated limited forms of agency.

Beyond legal constraints, women were subjected to strict social norms governing behavior, speech, and education. Manuals on etiquette and conduct defined the actions and manners deemed appropriate for ladies, often emphasizing decorum and self-restraint over independence or intellectual engagement (Gregory). For example, John Gregory's "A Father's Legacy to his Daughters" argues that frank behaviour might, on some occasions, "render [women] more agreeable as companions, but ... make [them] less amiable as women" (Gregory). Women were expected to cultivate accomplishments such as playing musical instruments, learning foreign languages, or practicing dance—skills that were valued less for personal enrichment than for their utility in securing a desirable marriage (Young 155, in "An accomplished woman"). Intellectual pursuits, particularly novel-reading, were discouraged for women: Gisborne, for example, suggested that novels could undermine femininity by fostering excessive intellect (Sutherland 214, in "An Accomplished Woman"). Women were taught to moderate wit, assertiveness, and opinion: as Gregory warns, "wit is the most dangerous talent you can possess. It must be guarded with great discretion and good nature, otherwise it will create you many enemies" (Gregory). Collectively, these reveal a society determined to shape women into pleasing, compliant figures, prioritizing social acceptability and marital prospects over intellectual development, autonomy, or personal expression.

These constraints were vividly reflected in the worlds Austen depicts in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse navigate a society that monitors female behavior, where speaking too boldly, acting independently, or prioritizing personal desire over social expectation could invite censure. Elizabeth, for instance, refuses a financially

advantageous marriage, asserting her moral judgment over social convention. Likewise, Emma, though wealthy and socially privileged, must carefully calibrate her actions to maintain propriety while exercising influence in her community. Their experiences reveal how women of Austen's era were required to convert intellect, virtue, and social skill into limited forms of "feminine capital" to gain leverage in a society that circumscribed legitimate forms of female authority.

Education and social training also reinforced women's dependence. While women could gain knowledge, their learning was often restricted to subjects considered socially appropriate, emphasizing refinement rather than autonomy. This shaped Austen's heroines' understanding of themselves and their options: Elizabeth is keenly aware of her intellectual and social limitations, yet she uses discernment and wit to navigate her constrained world. While Emma's confidence in her wealth and social position enables her to act boldly, it is not, as John Gregory and other authors of female conduct books assert, without social risk. While Emma's confidence in her wealth and social position enables her to act boldly, though not without social risk, Austen's depiction of these social and legal pressures provides the backdrop against which her heroines negotiate power, revealing both the constraints imposed on women and the subtle forms of influence they could exercise within a patriarchal system (Gregory).

Link to Full Paper:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14lXDfaRSjO6vFfChq9NanCASgIbZd9EP/view?usp=sharing>

III. Green Bay Press Times Article Sample (AP Format):

Title: A hub of connection

GREEN BAY – In a world where retirement can often bring a sense of isolation, the Green Bay Retired Men’s Club stands out as a vibrant, welcoming hub of connection and community. Every Tuesday morning, members gather at the Brown County Library Auditorium, filling the room with lively conversations and laughter.

For over five decades, this meeting has offered retired men a place to connect, share their stories and explore new interests, creating a rich tapestry of experiences that enhance their lives.

The morning meetings, bustling with laughter and handshakes, capture the essence of the club, which can be summed up in three words: “fellowship, quality, and leadership,” as described by Mike Albers, president.

For many, this weekly gathering is not just an event; it’s a highlight of their week. Some are so eager to be there that they arrive as early as 7 a.m. — well before the 8:30 a.m. start time. “Every week [the meetings] are really good, that’s why people keep showing up,” one member remarked, reflecting on the engaging speakers and diverse programs.

The club hosts speakers from various backgrounds, including business leaders, educators and healthcare professionals. “You’re never too old to learn something. That’s really what this is—a learning experience,” Bruce Stoeher added. After a talk on volunteer reading programs, one member was inspired to start coaching children, highlighting the club’s impact.

Joseph Torrez, a military veteran, has embraced the activities offered by the club. “I try to make it as much as I can,” he shared, reminiscing about his favorite outings and tours. One memorable trip was the Brewers game they attended, which he joined despite his dislike for baseball. “I just hate baseball... but I love bus rides, so I said okay,” he recalled.

To Torrez’s surprise, the trip became a highlight, filled with enjoyable conversations among fellow members. “Boy, did I have a great time! It turned out to be the best baseball game I’ve ever been to,” he said.

For Tom McCoy, the club’s true value lies in its community. “When you’ve been retired for 30 years like I have, keeping in touch with others is essential. It gives you a chance to be with people and make new friends,” he explained.

During COVID-19, members stayed connected with virtual events, ensuring that the sense of community endured.

“People need community, and that’s what we provide,” McCoy reflected, underlining the enduring importance of this organization.

With an average attendance of 113, the atmosphere buzzes with enthusiasm as the Green Bay Retired Men's Club thrives on community spirit.

Tom Froelich, treasurer, emphasized their commitment to accessibility. "We don't ask the members for [additional] money; we just ask them to come and enjoy themselves," he said. Membership dues are just \$20 a year, ensuring that anyone interested can join the fun without financial burden.

This minimal fee covers the essentials and allows the club to provide quality programming and engaging activities. "We're not making money," Froelich added. "As long as we can stay healthy financially, we're going to leave it that way."

The club thrives through the selfless efforts of its members — many arrive before dawn to prepare coffee for 120 — reinforcing the importance of social life, especially for retirees. As the aroma of sweet rolls fills the air, conversations flow, stories are shared and laughter echoes through the hall. The Green Bay Retired Men's Club is not just a gathering place, it's a vibrant community where men celebrate life, share wisdom and support one another for those 55 and older.

Here, in this warm space filled with smiles, members find not just entertainment and education, but a sense of belonging that makes each Tuesday a cherished occasion. The Green Bay Retired Men's Club meets every Tuesday, 8:30-10:30 a.m., at the Brown County Library Auditorium in downtown Green Bay.

For more information, visit gbretiredmensclub.com.

Link: <https://gopresstimes.com/stories/a-hub-of-connection,181126>

IV. NETVUE Posts

- Contracted multi-part blog series co-written with Dr. Egan-Ryan
- Meta reflection on integrating vocation into our ENGL introductory course

Excerpt from Hope through Connection I: Integrating Vocation into Introductory Courses:

Caroline: As a student, I can say without a doubt that the course that has had the most impact on me has been Introduction to Literary Studies, which I took in the second semester of my first year. When I first came to college, I sought a way to rationalize being an English major, so I enrolled as a double major in English and Business Administration, despite having zero desire to major in business. Having a ‘practical’ degree as a safety net made me feel justified in pursuing my passion for English. The problem was that I loved poetry more than economics. I cherished getting lost in webs of characters in mystical worlds far more than learning about data analytics. I relished diving into the depths of a text, deciphering its explorations and revelations, much more than studying market activity. Yet I struggled to see how my love for literature could translate into a practical career. This course didn’t just teach me about literature; it opened my eyes to new perspectives, built a supportive community, and guided me toward understanding my own vocational path.

It was during this class that my doubts began to fade. In the midst of analyzing metaphors and unraveling themes, I started to notice something remarkable. The analytical skills I was developing—learning to see beneath the surface, asking thoughtful questions, and crafting arguments—were not confined to the pages of a novel. They were tools for navigating the real world, and for understanding people and their stories. Literature taught me empathy by allowing me to live a thousand lives and view the world through different lenses. It taught me to communicate clearly and persuasively, to think creatively, and to embrace complexity. These are the skills required of leaders, innovators, and change-makers. They are the foundation of meaningful work, no matter the field. In finding my passion, I discovered that the so-called ‘impractical’ path of an English major is, in many ways, the most practical choice I could make for a fulfilling career.

Link to full post:

<https://vocationmatters.org/2024/10/08/hope-through-connection-integrating-vocation-into-introductory-courses/>

Hope Through Connection II:

Caroline: This former student’s story about her winding career path and intentional choices as a mother and community member gave me something unexpected: hope. I had absorbed the pressure to pick a job and stick with it, whether it sparked passion or not. Changing careers had

seemed like a failure and something to avoid. Her journey flipped that narrative. I began to see a career as a journey shaped by calling and flexibility, not fear of making the wrong choice.

What resonated most was her focus on the meaningfulness of her roles. She spoke without regret about career shifts, viewing them as stepping stones to something more fulfilling. Her story gave me permission to explore multiple vocations and reminded me that a job doesn't have to define me or be my sole source of purpose.

Her decision to live in an interracial neighborhood committed to social justice resonated deeply. In my Minneapolis high school, 82% of my peers were students of color, and 75% of them were economically disadvantaged. Growing up in this context taught me the value of empathy—of listening to stories unlike my own—and of the importance of acting on those values. This former student made major life decisions not for convenience or status, but for the kind of community she valued. Her actions reminded me that the choices we make—big and small—shape our vocations: where we live, whose voices we amplify, and which stories we bring to light.

In that moment, I realized that the life I want isn't about sticking to a narrow path or finding the “perfect” job. It's about weaving together career, community, family, and values into something whole. And that, more than anything, gives me hope for the future.

Link to full post:

<https://vocationmatters.org/2025/01/20/hope-through-connection-ii-called-beyond-career/>