Bryan Sabatini is an English major at NIU where he is also pursuing teaching certification. He comes from West Chicago and is a graduate of St. Charles East High School. He is a member of the Chung Do Mu Sool Won Martial Arts Organization and the College Teach House Community at NIU. His career goals include becoming a novelist and high school teacher and, eventually, pursuing a career as an administrator. Brian wrote “Storytelling,” a literacy narrative, in Melina Probst’s English 103 class. As a writer, he explains, “I want to express my passion for the stories that I have grown up with,” which have made him the writer and person he has become.”
What separates a narrative from a story? What changes a series of stated events into a wondrous unraveling yarn of heroes and villains, trial and triumph, of battles both personal and epic? What makes a story worth remembering? Is it the hero? The villain? Is it the development of the characters? No matter how ineffable the exact difference between a narrative and a story is, the distinction has always been there, and for me the secret lies somewhere in the telling.

It started in childhood, when my mother read those semi-ludicrous children’s stories found in almost every kindergarten classroom. My brother and I would sit in our shared bedroom, hours past our bedtime. I was probably four, and my brother was two years older. My parents both worked several jobs back then, and we’d seldom see my mom because she worked late nights. We’d stay up late playing with our Legos, killing time until Mom came through the door. She’d lecture us for staying up late, but we didn’t care because afterwards we’d beg her and beg her to read to us. We weren’t old enough to make out the words on the pages, but mom could make them come alive. It was then that we experienced our first imaginative stories. Those tales have long since been forgotten, but I remember the bright pictures and the sense of wonder. I remember hearing my mom’s voice as I faded into my dreams, dreams in which I was the hero, fighting the giant monsters and clever villains. Those nights of storytelling continued through my childhood. We grew and changed, but my mother kept on reading to us. When I got to kindergarten, we’d wait till the weekend. During the winter we’d stay in on Saturday; we’d curl up in my parent’s bed, and Mom would read the stories of The Magic Treehouse. The tales were more complex, and the characters were lifelike. I would be trapped in tapestries of history and magic woven together with my mothers’ voice.

As I grew older and made my way through grade school, reading time was my favorite time of day. I still recall my second grade teacher reading Harry Potter and the Sorcerers’ Stone while I shyly held the hand of the girl I liked. It was in those days that I found my first real passion. Not
for characters or plot or storylines. What I loved, what I appreciated and became lost in, was the telling. Sitting and listening to those stories came to define my childhood: the act of storytelling, the comfort of my mothers’ voice, and the magic of the stories themselves. It was almost sacred to me, a ritual of the utmost importance. Mom continued the *Harry Potter* series for me after I finished second grade, but in school, they stopped reading to us, encouraging us to seek out books on our own.

I remember trying to find books to read and how discouraging it was. So many stories were written like textbooks. They were just dry narratives of events vaguely connected by characters that failed to come alive through the dreary language of the words printed on the page. They were narratives, but to me they could never be *stories*. Eventually I stopped trying to find books. It wasn’t until fifth grade, when I searched through the small shelf of books in my schoolroom, that I really found my first written story, recommended to me by a friend. *The Last Years of Merlin*, by T. A. Barron, was the first real book I fell in love with. It told the story of the Arthurian wizard Merlin as a youth. It told of his travels to the magical island of Finlayra and his trial and growth as he discovered his magical abilities. Again, it was not the story but the way it was told. Barron had managed to reflect the magic of a spoken story with his eloquent use of the written word. It was writing that I had never seen before. It was vivid, imaginative, and it flowed on the page as easily as through the lips. It was a five book series, and I blazed through it over and over again. I had stumbled upon a starting point, a place from which to search. I found what I sought. High fantasy became my favorite pastime. It was only those writers who could write with the power and drama of story-tellers. I was entranced by the bards and minstrels who captured entire worlds through story and rhyme. I loved the way they made the language flow. The undulation of the words was as important as the words themselves. They were true stories, and I couldn’t get enough of them.

These are the origins of what I consider to be my art. I write and always strive to craft a story worth telling: stories of adventure and mystery. Beyond that, I try to present them eloquently, to bring to them the liveliness of a spoken story. Storytelling means something for me, it means comfort, the warmth of my mom’s voice, and the blossoming imagination of my youth.

It is sad that the ebb and flow of a good story has become somewhat of a dying art. Often, lyricism and rhythm are disregarded as frivolities. Meanwhile, mechanics, structure, concision, and other things that make me cringe have become paramount. It is a shame to lose the power of our history, of our culture, in the dry, dreary pages of textbooks, rather than
the powerful epics of times past. I would rather follow in the footsteps of Homer than the editor of some textbook. I will always love losing myself in a strong story. Being swept away by the power of stories has come to define what I hope to achieve in my lifetime.

Now, as I make my way through college, I always make a distinction for myself. When people ask, I tell them that I am an English major or that I want to be an author. This is only a half-truth, because I think of it so differently. I want to tell stories, not write texts or essays. I want to capture people's imaginations and create a sense of magic. I want those who read my work to take something away from it. I want to leave them touched or awed. I am not a writer; writers express where they have been and what they have done and learned. I want to tell of new places, of old tales, mystery, and possibility. I want to express our highest aspirations, to satisfy the great wanderlust and adventurous spirit that I believe resides in everyone. I want to express what we as people are capable of, which is so much more than would fit in our little section of the universe, but not so much as to be beyond our collective imagination. I am not a writer; I am a storyteller.