DAKOTA FOSS

Dakota Foss graduated from Cary-Grove High School. His experiences in high school and college include participating in a comedy club, Book Club, and dodgeball. Dakota has not declared a major yet at NIU. His interests vary from music to longboarding. “The Delzell Experience” was Dakota’s first attempt at writing an interview essay, and he was pleased with the picture he drew of his former high school teacher.

Dakota wrote this analysis in Nicole Smith's English 103 course during the fall semester of 2010.
The bell rings, and kids slowly file into the room. One by one, they find their seats as the usual chatter begins to die down. Out of the newly found silence comes the sound of bells. As the ringing comes into focus, a synthesizer is found in the mix too. Soon, the entire classroom is crooned to by the smooth-sounding voice of Paul McCartney singing: “Simply having a wonderful Christmas time!” The atmospheric music is matched by steaming cups of hot chocolate, candy canes, and peppermints. As more and more people enter, smiles and greetings are exchanged; some can be heard exchanging grievances for not being able to see each other for a while after today, while others rejoice at the long break that they would soon have from school. Some of the more giving students have even brought gifts, such as cookies and gingerbread men to share with everyone else. Everything in the moment appears to be perfect.

The door quickly swings open with the bustle of an ended school day not far behind. A tall, familiar figure enters the doorway. His black hair is in its signature state: short but spiked with a slight edge that could probably slice a melon. His face is emotionless as his hand rises to readjust his glasses on his pointed nose while giving the room a quick one-over. As Paul McCartney reaches the second chorus, the man walks over to the window and raises the blinds, revealing the signature May sunshine. He simply walks, sits behind his desk, and says in a manner that is somehow emotionless yet authoritative, “What are you guys doing?!” This was a typical afternoon after school on a Monday; this was Book Club. The man who just entered is our sponsor teacher, Jeffery Delzell.

As things calm down, the leader of Book Club and one of Delzell’s favorite students, Mike McCrae, takes the stand to begin the meeting.

“Ehem, er, alright . . . who are we going to read this week?” Mike says nervously. The class looks around each other as barely half a dozen students raise their hand.

“Clearly Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep is a winner, Michael,” Delzell says sardonic in tone.
To the less informed, a situation like this might seem like a teacher being arrogant and talking unprofessionally; to us, this is just one of the quirks that make him popular among the student body. Delzell was very upfront about his disdain for books of fiction, yet he was the one that students chose to be the book club’s sponsor. It was a rather ironic decision, but despite his hatred for fake stories, he was clearly the best fit. English teachers could have spawned numerous questions about the symbolism of character x and action y, but Delzell brought something to the table that teachers often try to develop only to struggle with: friendship.

At first, students were clearly more infatuated with Delzell than the other way around: there were unwanted phone calls and conferences after school that seemed to drag on for him. The conferences were less about German and more about wanting to find out his taste in music and movies, though he rarely disclosed such information. However, as time wore on, a legitimate, two-way relationship formed between the students and Delzell. I, for example, earned the nickname “Noodles” for constantly walking into his classroom with a cup of Maruchan Ramen Noodles. This was probably his way of rationalizing my existence since I wasn’t in any of his classes and he didn’t know my name, but it was always said with a quiet affection all the same.

His love of students has never been pigeonholed to a specific sect of the student population, either. Delzell can easily relate to those who wish to argue about politics, sports, and, on a rare occasion, musical tastes. As a result, all kinds of students love to sit down and just talk with Delzell about life. Sometimes, his German classes instantly shift from learning about German culture and the intricacies of pronouns to a wrestling match with one of the star football players. The students will look on as each party struggles to pin down the other with plenty of quiet smack-talking happening along the way. This isn’t an act of disciplinary measure, but rather a “boys will be boys” moment that would probably make the board of education shake their collective head in disgust.

“Delzell, why you gotta be like that?” Mike utters in a
typical, sarcastic tone.

“Because, Mike, maybe you should pick a better book! One that doesn’t involve androids, dry subtlety, and Harrison Ford!”

The class chuckles, as this isn’t the first time Delzell refused to acknowledge the book by anything but its film counterpart, Blade Runner. Mike looks down with an affectionate “you've-got-to-be-kidding-me” look on his face. He tries his best to hide his smile but fails on all accounts.

\[\text{\textbackslash*}\]

Delzell clearly loves his job, even though it was not always his dream. After high school, he was frustrated and disenchanted with any thoughts about the future and possible careers. He aimlessly took classes his freshman year of college with much confusion as to how they would help him out in the future. Though he studied German for six years prior, the thought of studying more, much less teaching, was the furthest thing from his head.

His sophomore year, however, he had a teacher that completely changed that. The professor’s lessons were taught in a laid-back fashion that mixed lessons with humor. This had a profound effect on Delzell. At first, he was confused and baffled by the lessons he attended; he had always thought that teachers were “squares” and that teaching couldn’t be for him. Soon, this confusion was turned into a fascination that created the eagerness to learn, which is what all teachers hope for. It was not long until the thought of teaching as a profession became a central idea in his mind. “I decided that if I enjoyed being in his class so much, I might also enjoy making a career out of it,” he would later say.

After college, Delzell traveled and spent a year in Austria. This trip was pretty important to him because, growing up, Delzell was a self-described cultural hermit. He did not go out of his way to familiarize himself with the world and enjoyed his nice “American bubble.” The trip, however, changed this. Staying in Austria not only rekindled his love with the German language, but also opened his eyes to the rest of the world: new food, music, dancing, and trains of thought became a part of who he was. His work ethic also changed from being a relaxed slacker who procrastinated to someone who was suddenly forced to make many
deadlines. Upon returning to America, Delzell immediately began looking for openings for German Teachers.

“Okay, Ridley Scott did an alright job with the film ‘adaption’ of this book,” Mike quickly defends, “but there was so much that he did not, could not, pick up on in the film compared to the book!”

“See, Michael, books should not try to make us escape into fantasy realms. Instead, they should explain valuable events like the Russian Revolution or what really went down with JFK.”

“Oh … my … God …” Mike shakes his head in disgust.

“Shoot!” Delzell quickly and suddenly exclaims after glancing at his watch. He looks at Mike nervously then politely excuses himself from the room. Moments later, he returns with his toddler Ben. The room fills with the sound of girls adoring Ben while Delzell sighs with a slight smile on his face. No longer does he pay much attention to the discussion of Blade Runner. Instead, he spends time teaching his son how to draw in Microsoft Paint and begins teaching him German with a handful of flashcards.

Having a family also had a profound effect on Delzell. Before he got married and had his son, Delzell enjoyed wasting time with long nights of video game playing, and he spent endless hours doing absolutely nothing with his friends. While he still does those things, he now has to choose his battles wisely. Those fond times of goofing off are still valuable to him, but his family and even his career have become such integral parts of his life that he gladly puts them to the forefront with pride.

Perhaps this is why he is so beloved by students. To many people at Cary-Grove High School, Delzell represents the best of both worlds: as a teacher, he gets concepts across in an easy-to-understand manner, and, as a friend, he is easily relatable and funny. In a way, he gives human characteristics to teachers who often seem much older and distant than they really are. Having a full-time job seems so far away to me as a student, but Delzell brings a sense of realism to every student’s future. The stories of how clueless he
was in college and the successful man he is today bring a sense of vitality and optimism that very few teachers can inspire.

The gentle click of the clock signifies it is now 3:50. Books are shoveled around, backpacks zip up, and papers crinkle with the intensity of a leaf blower. Now that Book Club has adjourned, even fewer students are left. School has ended over an hour ago.

“Good job leading today,” Delzell says to Mike in a sincere manner.

“Thanks, man. When are we going to have that b-ball game?”

Delzell sets his son down and looks straight at Mike. He explains that he has to drop Ben off at home first but that he might be able to play later. However, he is unsure if he will be able to make it due to a large number of papers he has to grade by tomorrow.

The gentle autumn breeze appears to make the overcast sky move quickly. The five of us who remain huddle together and shake for warmth. The game’s cancellation seems to be the only possibility, as most of us have mounds of homework that we really needed to complete. Just as we begin to pack up, a car pulls into a parking spot before us. The car door bursts open, revealing a clearly rushed Delzell. He looks at all of us, empathizing with the cold and sets down his duffle bag.

“All right guys, who’s on my team?” he says with a slight smile on his face.