

She Seeks Adventure

Adriane Hanson says she wants adventure.

After the 25-year-old got in a car with a man she barely knew, took a digital recorder and answered probing questions about her life while he drove her around Richmond on an increasingly frigid January night, it would seem she means it.

This bit of boldness may seem out of character for someone whose voice quakes a bit when answering questions about her personal life. It may seem out of character for someone who tends to hide behind her fidgeting hands when the questions go to areas she would rather leave alone. But an afternoon and evening with the rather quiet twenty-something provides all the evidence one needs to prove that Hanson should not be so easily underestimated.

Adriane met her interrogator at a place one does not normally find MFA students: at a high school wrestling tournament. She was dressed for the weather—coat, gray dress, gray tights, and multi-colored scarf. She wore eyeglasses and had her Brunette hair back in a panned-up ponytail so that it formed a fan-like loop on the back of her head.

While she was not an anti-jock—she had been a swimmer at Maggie L. Walker Governor’s School in Richmond—her primary experience of wrestling was the faux-wrestling ads one cannot avoid on television. She had never been to a wrestling match. She watched in fascination as the boys practiced the ancient art of physically mastering one’s opponent. She gasped at a good takedown, muttered compliments for wrestlers who broke holds or pulled off a slick reversal, expressed concern for wrestlers who had to take a break to staunch a bloody nose.

She seemed to be having fun. Nevertheless, wrestling was not the primary item on the agenda that afternoon. Inquisition was, and that was made difficult by the shouts of the partisan crowd surrounding her and her interrogator.

“Pin him!”

“Watch your hips!”

“C’mon, let ’em wrestle!”

As the championship round wore on, Adriane succumbed to hunger and caffeine deprivation, and made arrangements to meet her interrogator at a coffee shop in Carytown.

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Her interrogator arrived just before closing time and began the inquisition there. When they were kicked out, he told her to get in his car. As he drove east toward the dark industrial wasteland beyond Shockoe Bottom, he pressed her for more information while she sat in the passenger seat, looking out the window and recording the evidence.

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Adriane began her literary career early. Her first publication, a poem, appeared in the Richmond Times-Dispatch when she was 11. She wrote from the perspective of a boy. The picture that ran with the poem in the paper featured a green-haired boy. The “confusion” did not

bother Adriane. More than a decade later, she seems to enjoy it—writing from the standpoint of a male is a technique she employs in her fiction today.

Writing seemed to be an effective outlet for a pre-teen who had trouble expressing herself otherwise.

“I kind of express myself better than I necessarily can in conversation,” Adriane said. “I don’t now if it’s because I’m a girl, or kind of quiet or whatever when I was growing up. I guess I felt like people didn’t really listen to me that much—I don’t know. I just found it to be the best way to express myself. ...

“It’s sort of something I do to, like, capture things that have happened to me or feelings. I find that a lot of times I can capture things better by writing a story about it, even though it becomes like a completely different thing.”

As she descended into adolescence, her writing output decreased. Even though she was an English and psychology major at William and Mary, she did not seriously consider pursuing her writing ambitions until she took an advanced fiction class taught by VCU’s Tom De Haven, who was serving as writer-in-residence at William and Mary at the time.

“I had thought about writing fiction before, but I’d never done it,” Adriane said. “For whatever reason I had some weird idea that I couldn’t do it. But I just started working on it and ... I don’t know ... I found it was something that I could do pretty well and loved to do.”

Writing fiction was, by then, a natural evolution from her poetry.

“It kind of made sense because I had begun to write narrative poetry,” Adriane said. “It was kind of natural for me to move to that.”

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Even though it seemed natural to write, Adriane took a year off after graduating from William & Mary to work for an after-hours program for emotionally challenged children at Crestview Elementary School in Henrico County.

“I love working with kids,” Adriane said. “I always felt really bad for them, because I really identified with them in away. ... They have a lot of really strong emotions and stuff, and they just don’t have the tools to deal with them yet. Its very hard. I think people over-romanticize childhood and they don’t remember how difficult it is to be a kid.”

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Eleven minutes into the drive, Adriane remarked that they were traveling down what looked like a “scary alley.” They did, in fact, as her interrogator had reached the industrial wasteland near where the James River takes a hard starboard turn toward the south. In viewing the ruins of Richmond’s industrial past, she revealed a fondness for the crumbling landscape.

“I sort of find urban decay and urban sprawl to be really beautiful in a way and kind of interesting,” Adriane said. “My brother’s a photographer and we’ll go on photography days where we just go around Richmond and take pictures of stuff.”

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This ability to find beauty in chaos inspires her writing. For example, one of her early adult adventures was a relationship with a man that included a small complication: a four year old child. The relationship did not last, but the worst part for her was not the pain of the breakup, but how the breakup affected the child. She had to take some time off from William and Mary to regroup.

When she came back, she found writing a powerful tool to make sense of life—a more powerful tool than psychology to help her fulfill her need to explore the wilderness of adulthood.

“I think it’s just a need to sort of capture the world in the way that I see it and I experience it,” Adriane said. “I guess just kind of to put that out there and to take life that is really messy and chaotic and in some ways to make it kind of like a beautiful narrative that, even if it is not always happy—it’s not happy or anything like that—just has a kind of beauty and makes sense in a certain kind of way. ... I think that’s a very attractive thing to do, to make sense out of life.”

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After reaching Route 5 down by Rockett’s Landing, her interrogator turned the car back to the west. They caught a reflection of the lights of downtown Richmond in the waters downstream of the last bit of rapids below the Fall Line. She noticed the beauty. He noticed the potential metaphor.

“Some people write to learn more about themselves,” he observed. “Some people write to keep from having to learn more about themselves. Where do you think you are?”

“I think it’s probably more to learn about myself,” she answered, “even if I sometimes find out things that are a little weird or whatever. I mean, it’s hard to come up with—I don’t know—why do you write?, like what’s your writing about and stuff? It’s always been hard for me to sum it up. But you know it’s interesting question to ask, for me to ask myself.”

As Adriane and her interrogator kept driving toward the long-set sun, it appeared her biggest adventure will always be exploring herself.

—*David M. Lawrence*