

Catalyst Profile
Jennifer Veilleux

Jennifer Veilleux, the WCU alumna of 2008, practices “alchemy.” Each day, she melds her love of literature, professional writing, and theology from the associate editor’s desk at Bethany House Publishers in Bloomington, Minnesota.

“I’m challenged to make good writing better, to clarify the unclear and to help the good news of Jesus Christ get out into the world,” said Veilleux, describing her position at the 50-year-old Christian publishing firm.

As something similar to an academic alchemist, her pursuit of the universal elixir started at WCU. In 2005, when the Killian Annex was still a “pile of construction materials,” Veilleux began her undergraduate degree in English-Literature and Philosophy-Religion, with a minor in English-Professional Writing.

She spent her semesters delving into anything from the “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” to the intricacies of Islamic traditions. Kenneth Price showed her “where all the commas go,” while Mimi Fenton helped her forge a love for Milton.

“I was amazed and encouraged as the seemingly disparate classes offered materials that overlapped and expounded upon one another,” said Veilleux. **“It helped me see how these academic areas spoke to each other and also how this intersection spoke to the world at large.”**

After graduating Summa Cum Laude in May 2007, Veilleux took a step toward exploring just that—the “world at large.” With hopes of refining her professional writing skills, she worked at Camp Omega, a Lutheran summer camp in Waterville, Minnesota.

It was there in the small, rural town that the North Carolina native decided to pursue a degree in systematic theology. In 2011, after earning a master's in English-Professional Writing from WCU, Veilleux headed off to Luther Seminary.

While there, she served as an editorial fellow for a “Greek-intensive” class on the book of Romans. She also presented a paper at a regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

“I never would have been ready for those opportunities, or had the courage to take them, if it weren’t for the ways WCU had prepared me,” said Veilleux.

Much of that preparation came in the way of mentoring from professors within the English Department.

While the “gentle guidance and wisdom” of Annette Debo melded Veilleux into a “well-rounded, empathetic and compassionate” individual, the postcolonial work of Laura

Wright expanded her worldview. Brent Kinser inspired a love for research while Brian Gastle encouraged her to find a passion outside of academia.

“I will also never forget getting a fiction writing assignment back from Dr. Brian Railsback where he wrote at the top, ‘If you can write, why not do it?’” said Veilleux.

Through a bit of alchemy, Veilleux has acted upon that advice and turned writing into a way of life.

“Don’t listen to those who tell you that a degree in English is useless,” said Veilleux. “It might take creativity, hard work and time, but it’s possible to make a living pursuing what you love.”