

When change came his way

English teacher Brandon Raycraft spent his life planning to serve his country in the military but found himself serving in the classroom instead.

BY NATE MEREDITH
Staff Writer

When English teacher Brandon Raycraft was in college, he thought he had his whole life planned out. But things didn't go as he expected. He enlisted in the Army as a sophomore at UNC Greeley and planned on working his way up through the ranks, going from basic enlisted soldier to Rangers and then Special Forces.

It was an especially humid day when Raycraft and his friends, who just finished basic training, met in the "Chow Hall" for dinner. The humidity wouldn't normally be a problem, but for Raycraft, it meant that his hands were covered in blisters. As he was tearing loose skin from his hands, hiding it the best he could, one of his buddies caught a glimpse.

"What the hell is going on with your hands?" the drill sergeant barked at Raycraft. And no more than a week later, he was sent home.

"I didn't know what I would do," Raycraft said.

The problem was a skin condition called Bullous Dermatitis, and it is the same rare skin disease that kept his father from serving in the Vietnam War.

Raycraft found himself lost and directionless. He ended up back in Greeley, working on the college degree that he started before his short lived Army career. He wanted to find the quickest way out of college, and after a meeting with his counselor, he decided on History.

Raycraft knew he wanted to travel after college, and taking the advice of an old friend, he decided on New Zealand. With nothing to lose, and everything to gain, 24-year old Raycraft bought a plane ticket.

To keep himself entertained on the 15 hour flight from CO to NZ, he picked up a copy of Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club* before he took off, and he was instantly sucked in. On that flight, he felt a passion ignite that he had never felt before.

"*Fight Club* invigorated a love for [reading]," he said.

He wound up in a town called Dunedin, and here, nearly all of his time was spent

outdoors - whether it was watching rugby, hiking, or nose deep in a book. As his love for reading grew, so did his desire to learn more about literature.

One night, after a strenuous day of backpacking, he sat down next to a small stream of water. And with the Milky Way shining down from above, he started to replay what brought him there, going over the good points and the bad.

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*English teacher
Brandon Raycraft*

"I'm okay with not being sure about everything," Raycraft said. "I started to accept the world as it was, and what I could control and what I couldn't."

As he started to run out of money, he realized that traveling wasn't a permanent solution to his problems.

He said, "life before New Zealand and life after New Zealand was completely different - I was a different person."

Upon returning to Colorado, the experiences that he had in New Zealand pushed him to pursue a career in teaching.

After getting his teaching license at Metropolitan State University of Denver, he got hired at East High School, and it was a rough first year. They had him teach both English and Geography, and after a few years, he wanted out.

He applied to work at Creek while on a trip in Spain, and to his surprise, they got back to him right away. He had remote interviews in Lisbon and Amsterdam, and once he got back to the states, he got the job.

"You just gotta believe that it'll get better," Raycraft said.



PHOTO BY MADISON SECKMAN

ENJOYING HIS TIME TEACHING: As a person who didn't enjoy reading until later in his life, Brandon Raycraft makes learning interesting to grab the attention of his students. After traveling abroad during college, he had many stories that he now brings into his teaching to inspire his students to learn.