



JEN SGUIGNA

Letters from

History Alumni

Jen Sguigna is currently a Program Manager with the Juno Beach Centre Association. She completed her Honours BA in History (2012) and MA in Public History (2013) at Western University.

During my second year at Western, I attended an information session about the Public History MA program. I always knew I wanted to do history, but I couldn't have told you what that meant. Discovering public history changed the course of my life, quite literally.

Now, I had a path: I wanted to do history with a selfless enjoyment of the subject; I wanted to engage others in the thing that so deeply engaged me. For the first time, that seemed reasonable and attainable. I started paying more attention to the stories that interested me and to the history that surrounded me. I ignored prepared lists of essay topics and wrote instead on the crucifixion of soldiers in the First World War and female criminality in 19th century Ontario.

Western History impressed on me a new variety of self-assurance and independence. I will always rely on my ability to form my own ideas, to argue and support them, in every facet of my life. It's an invaluable, infinitely transferable skill history grads cannot do without. The professors I worked with – Craig Simpson, Jonathan Vance, and Michelle Hamilton – helped me not only to find my voice, but also to figure out what I wanted to say.

I will always fondly remember the secluded parts of Weldon, the reading room at ARCC, and the halls of Lawson Hall. The friends I made in these places have gone on to use their history degrees in a myriad of ways that eighteen-year-old me could never have imagined.

The thing I really latch onto with history is individual stories. History is full of people for us to connect with. By filling in the space between dates and laws and conflicts with human stories, history becomes a lot more accessible. Empathy with the stories of others is an essential part of the human experience.

I now work for an organization that keeps the history and sacrifice of Canadians during the Second World War in the consciousness of the country. I love what I do – the combination of education, curation, and commemoration is all I could ask for. History taught me why what I do is important; public history showed me how to make everyone else see it too.