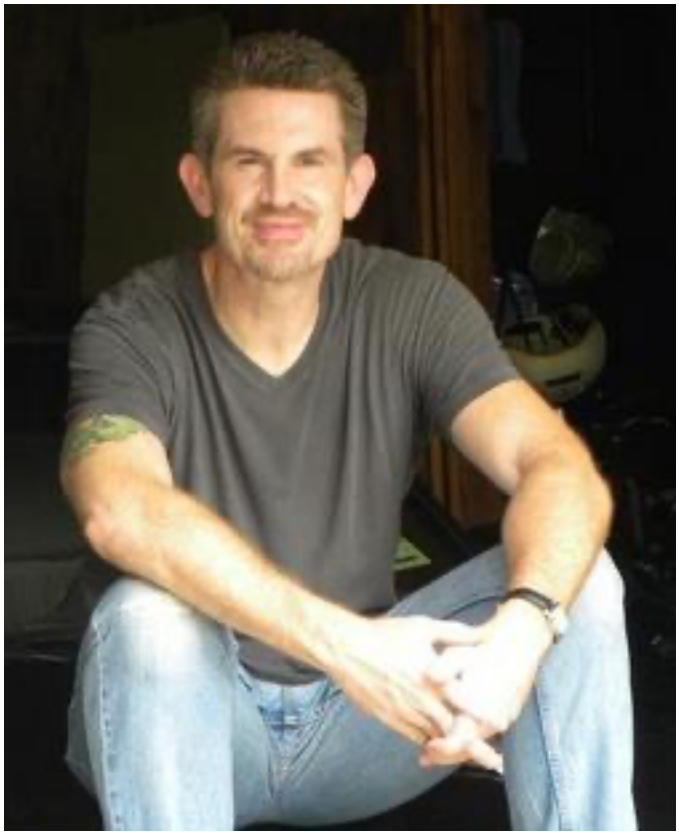
In Memoriam – Jason Courtmanche

April 15, 1969 - November 27, 2024



Jason Courtmanche showed up for his first day of student teaching at an alternative high school for at-risk students and found a note on his desk telling him that his cooperating teacher was in Peoria, Illinois attending to her mother's funeral and would be out indefinitely. It was a baptism by fire and one of the best things that ever happened to him, professionally speaking. Jason spent most of his career in Connecticut. He was at the University of Connecticut for 29 of the past 37 years, where he has been an undergraduate English major, a non-degree education student, a doctoral student, an adjunct professor, and now for the past 17 years the Director of the Connecticut Writing Project and in-residence faculty in English, as well as Early College Experience Assistant Coordinator and affiliate faculty in Teacher Education.

– Jason Courtmanche Bio from a book project

Jason Courtmanche was a man of many talents and a master of most – master teacher, master writer; master dreamer; master innovator; master gardener; master husband, father, friend and colleague. The list goes on. Jason had a brilliant mind and a sharp wit. He was an avid reader, as evidenced by the thousands of books lining the walls of his home

and office. He had an eidetic memory – he could tell you the plot and characters from novels he'd read decades earlier and cite exhaustive details of nonfiction works. His goal while on medical leave was to read a book a day and, even as sick as he was, he came close to accomplishing that, posting titles, details, and reviews about his latest reads.

Jason was a remarkable and unforgettable man. He wasn't perfect, but then none of us are, but Jason was a survivor. We nearly lost him in 2020 when the Powassan Virus, a rare tick-borne illness, landed him in the Intensive Care Unit packed in ice with a fever of 107. The Powassan Virus caused encephalitis, a serious inflammation of the brain, which left Jason with some long term effects. Maybe his brain didn't work quite as well as it had, his eidetic memory slipped sometimes, and he had to write things down in order to remember to do them, but we all joked that he was now closer to being like the rest of us normal humans.

But last spring, Jason became very ill and was eventually diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer that had no known cure and a dire prognosis. But we all knew what a survivor Jason was, so we believed that he would beat this cancer, just like he had beaten the Powassan Virus and encephalitis. We knew how brave, strong, and resilient he was.

For months he was in and out of the hospital, courageously fighting the deadly disease. His strong, handsome frame weakened as he received a variety of treatments. His wife, Amy Nocton, started a Caring Bridge for him, where she or Jason posted his health journey nearly every day. To get an idea of how wide a circle of family and friends Jason had, that Caring Bridge site has had 32,389 visits.

If courage and strength were all it took to survive cancer, he would still be with us. Jason had an abundance of both. But cancer is wily and deadly. Jason entered the Connecticut Hospice facility in Branford, Connecticut, looking out on a beautiful view of Long Island Sound, on Friday, November 22, 2024, surrounded by family who kept music playlists playing in the background. Sadly, Jason passed away during a beautiful sunrise on Wednesday, November 27, 2024, to the sounds of Nora Jones' *Sunrise* and Diana Krall's version of *It Had to Be You*.

We do not know what lies beyond this mortal life, but I believe in a hereafter. I like to believe that when a loved one dies, especially when, like Jason, it's far too early for them to go, it's because their good energy is needed elsewhere - we just don't know where. I like to think that Jason is still hiking in majestic forests, writing beautiful poems and other powerful pieces, and having a lively discussion with his favorite authors. Maybe he has finally met Nathaniel Hawthorne, a writer who helped shape his career and his life.

Hawthorne is quoted as saying, "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living." That can never be said about Jason. He lived his life to the fullest, savoring every moment, every person, and every word. Life is not fair. Jason had so many more students left to inspire and far too many more books to read and words to write. No matter how long Jason had lived, it would never have been long enough, but he did live, and he lived well. We, all the

people upon whom he had an impact, will remember him—with deep love and respect—always.

Happy trails, dear friend…

Jane Cook, colleague and friend for 17 years

Jason walking UConn campus during our 2024 CWP Summer Institute writing marathon, July 18, 2024