Kelly Magee  
2014 Summer Research/Creative Activities Grant  
Proposal Narrative

I am applying for a Summer Research/Creative Activities Grant to support my work on a collection of flash nonfiction tentatively titled *Apocrypha: Nonfiction Fables.* This collection follows the successful completion, and acceptance for publication, of two projects: a book of flash fiction, *With Animal* (co-written with Carol Guess), forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press, and several short stories that resulted from my last successful Summer Grant proposal, a manuscript called *Shadow Families* from which three stories have been published in literary journals (*The Kenyon Review, The Tampa Review,* and *Crazyhorse*). My new collection, which I intend to finish this summer, is a multi-genre work that explores the intersections of truth, belief, and family history.

*Apocrypha* will be a collection of short essays that use the fairy tale form to narrate real family histories. The essays seek to find the miraculous in the everyday – times when relatively common events, such as childbirth, visiting family, or witnessing a death, take on mythic proportions in one’s own memory. The challenge is how to accurately portray the power these events have on an individual, even as culturally we may be desensitized to them. My use of the fairy tale form is intended to make the tension between subject and story – memory and narration – explicit. The term “apocrypha,” with its religious connotations, will factor greatly in the pieces. Because I am contesting the line between fiction and nonfiction, these will, of course, be somewhat dubious accounts (apocryphal). The role of invention in the recounting of family history will be foregrounded. Moreover, I am interested in studying the kinds of belief that become representative truths. Each essay will take as its title a particular belief, beginning with those like “Holy Hour,” “Immaculate Conception,” and “Perpetual Adoration,” that come from Christianity. The essays will function as creative
definitions of these terms, connecting the events of a personal family history to the miraculous, and using the language of fairy tale to underscore that perception. Broadening this concept from Christianity, I intend to look at other belief systems as well—mythical, spiritual, and even psychological ones.

In my graduate and undergraduate fiction and nonfiction classes, we routinely discuss the gray area between fact and fiction, memory and invention, and reality and representation. The English Department’s new MFA in Creative Writing emphasizes multigenre work, and during my teaching of English 506, “Seminar in Creative Writing: Multigenre,” we discussed books that straddle lines of genre and form, such as Ander Monson’s Vanishing Point: Not a Memoir and Lauren Slater’s Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir.

Likewise, in my recent large GUR, English 227 “GLBT Literature,” we looked at how queer writers might engage in both gender- and genre-bending, as a way of representing truth. At the 2012 Association of Writers and Writing Programs’ Annual Conference, I presented on a panel about “Truth in Nonfiction,” where we discussed that same nebulous gray area. In my new collection, I intend to explore the similarly tricky territory between truth and belief, and to use form and genre to further complicate that boundary.

Several packets of these essays are under submission at literary journals, and I am confident that this book will be publishable in the very near future. The Summer Research/Creative Activities Grant will enable me to complete the manuscript and begin submitting the entire collection to literary presses. I have maintained several contacts with editors through the process of publishing With Animal, and I have published seventeen short stories, three essays, and two prose poems over the last two years. The Summer Research/Creative Activities Grant will allow me the sustained time to work on this larger, solo project that I intend to complete and submit by the summer’s end.