During my two months on Kent Island this summer, I had the unique opportunity to get a taste of life as a full-time writer, while living on a beautiful scientific station. Given the breakneck pace of life during the academic year, I was eager to devote my time to working on the craft of writing itself, and to truly observe and learn the island as a place in order to interpret it through writing. With the knowledge that I would be living without many modern conveniences, particularly those of the technological variety, I anticipated taking advantage of the opportunity to craft essays and short fiction inspired by this place, free of distractions.

Life on Kent Island offered distractions of a more productive nature: the weekly chores, afternoons in the kitchen, and outings to explore marine life impacted both my schedule as a writer and my writing itself. Over the course of the summer, I kept a daily journal, which I eventually used to supplement my final piece of writing: a comprehensive essay detailing my experiences living and working on the island. I also had the opportunity to do a good amount of reading, and I turned to short stories and novels for inspiration as I worked on my own fiction (some favorite authors including Elizabeth Bowen, David Mitchell, and Edith Pearlman). In writing short stories, which became my primary focus, I was able to learn about and refine my own creative process. I found a variety of enchanting spots on the island – on the dock, by the ocean, in the heart of an ancient forest – where I went to develop ideas, plan out plots, and write by hand. After producing a plan for each story and handwriting a few scenes, I tended to switch to a computer for several days until I completed a draft. My final collection is titled Jagged Edge and features seven original short stories: “Richard and the Puddle,” “The Astor Daily News,” “The Wheelbarrow,” “Jagged Edge,” “By the Lake,” “D Minor,” and “A Rekindling.”

Lacking constant access to communication with those off the island, going weeks at a time without leaving the island at all, and setting off to write alone on a daily basis, the notion of isolation was at the front of my mind and I factored it into each of my stories in some manner. I drew inspiration from nature and my observations of this particular place; many stories are set in small seaside towns and reference particular species that scientists study on the island. “Jagged Edge” is based on my research into the history of a lighthouse on a barren rock that is visible from Kent Island; the story features a lighthouse keeper driven to insanity by the literal isolation. “By the Lake” centers around 12-year-old Maude, who feels both torn between and left behind by her older brother and best friend as they mature in opposing ways over the summer. Several stories (“Richard and the Puddle,” “The Wheelbarrow,” and “D Minor”) follow elderly men and women as they deal with deaths of beloved spouses or reflect on failed relationships.

Through my weeks on the island, I had an incredible opportunity to grow both personally and as a writer. Between exploring the island myself, learning its rich history from stories around the dinner table, and assisting with scientific fieldwork, I came to know and love the place, and reached a new level of attentiveness to nature. Having the time and freedom to work on my writing and its process, I was able to complete a substantial body of work, often inspired by the island. I intend to continue my work on these stories and others throughout the year, with the eventual goal of completing a short story collection. I am incredibly grateful for this experience; it has been integral to my growth as a writer.