

Family, mentors fueled ASU grad's creative writing

By Jr De Chavez, ASU News
April 30, 2025

Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2025 graduates](#).

At first glance, Mia Milinovich is the quintessential honors student: sharp, articulate and unflinchingly driven. But she's also a writer, a creative, a storyteller, whose relationship with the literary arts began long before the confines of the classroom.

"I used to tell stories a lot before I started writing them," she said. "We'd go camping and I'd tell really stupid stories I made up for my younger siblings, Ava and Dane."

She credits her upbringing and family for fueling her creativity.

"We've always lived in the same house. We've always lived in the same state and been close," she said. "My dad, Matt; my mom, Treasure; my younger sister, Ava; and brother, Dane — we're a tight-knit group."

Being born and raised in Cave Creek, Arizona, Milinovich's heart lies deep within the Valley.

"I've grown up here my entire life," she said. "Growing up, I didn't appreciate Arizona as much, but I've developed such a strong love for the desert."

It's this connection to home that later inspired her to write her entire Barrett honors thesis about life in the desert. It was a way of romanticizing the Arizona experience while paying respect to underrepresented places in the world, especially in literature.

"Growing up, I'd read books all the time, and every character was from New York or California," she said. "I think states that aren't necessarily talked about all the time have significant stories, too. (In Arizona), I got to be outside all the time, go on hikes with my mom and sister, explore caves, swim in the pool and just go out with my siblings."

Milinovich's innate desire to tell stories untold was fanned by her teacher, Lori Hart, as a sophomore at Cactus Shadows High School. Hart encouraged Milinovich to join the school's literary magazine.

"(Hart) told me that I should write more often, and then I just did," Milinovich said.

Little did she realize at the time, that subtle push was a powder keg to Milinovich's journey toward professional storytelling, and her time spent in Hart's class would propel her into her collegiate pursuits.

"Instead of doing a traditional newspaper, we focused (almost entirely) on creative writing," Milinovich said. "I was writing pretty consistently from that point on."

This love with words carried her to Arizona State University, where she double majored in [English \(literature\)](#) at The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and [journalism](#) at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication — a pairing that felt intuitive.

"I think I'm extremely lucky in the sense that my two degrees have a lot of overlap," she said. "I first got to ASU with the idea I would study literature, but for me, it was always about learning to write in as many ways as I could. Journalism gave me a way to talk about real people and tell real stories."

As a Sun Devil, Milinovich wore many hats. Perhaps most notably, she worked as a producer for [ASU Student Life](#), where she wrote articles, managed social media accounts and produced a wide range of digital content that highlighted student success stories and amplified the authentic voices of her Sun Devil peers.

She said the experience was "collaborative and rewarding," and that she grew comfortable posting content, coordinating video ideas and measuring growth.

"We're coming up on 14,000 followers (on Instagram)!" she said. "We've done so many team efforts, and I think that's really paid off."

Milinovich said that her time spent at ASU Student Life was, in a way, honoring her younger self.

"I have a ton of pictures of me with Sparky, and doing Pat's Run growing up and being intertwined with the community," she said. "I looked at this job as a way to give back to that; it was really fun to honor that side of me who was four, and coming to events down here on the Tempe campus."

Beyond ASU, Milinovich interned remotely for the New York-based book publishing house, Macmillan — a role she pursued since her first year.

"I got to proofread advanced reader copies, handle podcast outreach and manage a ton of spreadsheets. The publishing world is fast-paced, but I loved being a part of it."

Managing academics, work and internships isn't a walk in the park, but Milinovich took it in stride.

"It's difficult to manage that many things unless you really want it, and I'm an insomniac, so I wasn't going to sleep anyway," she said, laughing.

Milinovich's love for academia was also marked by the mentorship, admiration and gratitude she held for those who guided her along the way, like Donald Fette, a Barrett, The Honors College professor known for starting each class with a song.

"It's a scary topic knowing you're going to have to talk and debate in every class, but he was just such a creative professor. The prompts he would bring to the table were just fantastic," she said. "One time, we watched 'Sympathy for the Devil' right before we read 'Inferno.'"

In the Department of English, she said Professor Elizabeth Horan enthusiasm and care into every classic literature lecture — hallmarked with coconut chocolates and other snacks to the night classes. And at the Cronkite School, Catherine Williams, then a professor of practice in the Cronkite News capstone, pushed her to step out of her comfort zone as a reporter.

“She helped me feel more confident and encouraged me to dig deeper. She was the one who sent me to Ganado to cover a hospital opening on the Navajo Nation,” she said.

Now, Milinovich’s next chapter is beginning to take shape, where she looks to rise from the Valley toward the mountaintops.

“I’m probably moving to Colorado,” she said. “I love Arizona with my whole heart and I’m definitely coming back — but I think it’s time for me to struggle a little somewhere else for a bit.”

If there’s one thing she hopes to share with incoming ASU students, it’s this: “Be true to yourself. There’s goodness in pursuing what you’re passionate about. Don’t let others’ opinions steer you away from that. Obviously, do what’s best for you — but I had a fantastic experience studying what I already loved.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Mia Milinovich pictured in her favorite place — the Phoenix Public Library. Photo by Autumn Williams/ASU Student Life

Text image(s)



Mia Milinovich sits at her desk at the Memorial Union Creative Studio. She was the Producer for ASU Student Life. | Photo courtesy of Autumn Williams, ASU Student Life Photographer/Videographer



Mia Milinovich and Sparky (c. 2007) — Photo courtesy of Mia Milinovich



Mia Milinovich stands in front of Old Main. Photo courtesy by Autumn Williams/ASU Student Life.