

Magazine and Feature Writing

Christy Brown Writing Examples



Scarlet and Gold

Scarlet – a long-standing Christian representation of the blood shed by Jesus Christ.

Gold – a symbol of God’s promised eternity found in the story of Jesus’s death on the cross.

The two together, Scarlet and Gold, combine to make the Christian lifestyle and gift brand rooted in Auburn, Alabama, and started by Auburn alumna Megan Smalley.

“My passion or my calling was to create a business that takes the gospel to all the nations in a creative way,” Smalley says. “And that’s what we’re all about.”

With products including art prints, t-shirts, phone cases and greeting cards, the team of 14 women works tirelessly to bring original artwork to customers across the nation.

“What we want to do is basically plant a seed in people’s hearts by a simple product or handwritten note,” VP of Customer Service Mary Leigh Felix says. “Anything that we can do to shine the Lord’s light.”

The first two years the Scarlet and Gold team based the company out of Smalley’s house, filling online orders and advertising through social media and print ads. However, in September of 2015 Scarlet and Gold opened their first retail store in Auburn, Alabama.

“The retail side of things has been a huge learning curve on our part. Owning a business is not as glamorous as it looks from the outside,” Smalley said with a laugh.

Juggling the retail store while still balancing filling orders and designing new lines pushes the employees to step in when needed to get the job done.

“Once everything gets busy we are more of an ‘all hands on deck’ team,” Felix says. “We see our business as no one job is better than the other. When there is a busy day with lots of orders everyone helps.”

Scarlet and Gold uses social media as a key method to reach their target audience of women ages 16-40, and their Instagram is their most active account with over 86,700 followers.

“We try to be excellent in the details so for us it’s mainly about keeping branding consistent,” Smalley says. “Making sure everything that leaves this place is on brand and that includes social media.”

Scarlet and Gold struggled initially with ensuring branding consistency but now their team works with local photographers Brandon and Kristin Kidd to create a universal look to all their photographed products.

“For a while we shot our own pictures but we just had a whole lot of inconsistency in the way things looked,” Smalley says. “So we created an image library so our posting team is able to post images from the drop box.”

Their social media strategy uniquely incorporates the different personalities of their employees by allowing five women to rotate posting days, giving them freedom to write captions for the products being posted.

“I believe that our social media approach brings something new to the table because we are all in different seasons of life,” Chandler Mann, the director of visuals and styling says. “I’m 25 so I could relate to a college girl easier than one of us who is pregnant and married could and vice versa. That allows us to reach different audiences throughout the week.”

Many of the products on Scarlet and Gold’s website have Christian inspiration, corresponding with the company’s mission. However this emphasis on faith isn’t reserved for their products alone. It also spills into the lives of every employee.

“I care about who my girls are inside and outside of work. I care about their hearts and I care that everything we do reflects what we believe,” Smalley says. “We try to live that out on a daily basis. We love hard and we hold people accountable.”

Scarlet and Gold’s business strategy relies heavily on Christian doctrine as well, influencing their business partners and ensuring that they are morally in line with their beliefs.

“It doesn’t mean we don’t work with non-believers,” Smalley says. “We have a huge heart for the lost here and not everything we do is Christian based or related. We just try to love people when they walk in the door and hope they see something different when they walk into the place.”

As CEO and owner Smalley also encourages and incorporates practicing a relationship with God in the daily activities of her team. Every week begins with a Monday meeting of prayer and ends on Friday with a devotional led by Mann.

“You just don’t see a lot of Christian companies,” Mann says. “You see a lot of nonprofits but you don’t see actual Christian companies where women are able to do what they love and also support their families.”

Although only two and a half years old, Scarlet and Gold has received media attention from multiple high-profile news outlets including E News, Us Weekly and The Today Show.

“I really do believe it’s the Lord’s favor on this company. That’s what everything comes back to,” Mann says. “It plays into every decision made, how conflict is handled, being able to rejoice in good season and just being able to make much of the Lord’s name and realizing that’s the only reason we’re all here doing this.”

Smalley and her team have high hopes for Scarlet and Gold in the future to continue to expand out of the Southeast and eventually internationally.

“We dream pretty big around here, and the Lord has been super faithful,” Mann says. “I think it is super surreal to see our products in stores like in my college town in Kansas or visiting a friend in Dallas. Seeing something that I designed in stores is one of the most surreal things ever. I hope that we can continue to grow in that facet.”

Smalley clings to the standard that her team works hard and continues to invest in a relationship with God in order to continue accomplishing success.

“I think part of being a business owner is finding the right people who will join your crusade and believe whole heartedly in what you’re doing,” Smalley says. “We are all friends and love each other but it is hard sometimes. Having the right people in that way is so important and I do. I have a great team.”

The employees at Scarlet and Gold look to Jesus for encouragement, energy and hope in the work they put forth in their products.

“I’m not in it for the money. If I was I would be very unhappy,” Smalley said with a laugh. “To me what we’re doing matters for eternity and that’s the bottom line. As long as we’re making an impact somehow, in someway I would be very content with that.”

Auburn community fights for their town

Two thousand signatures and a passion for their town has not been enough to stop development in the historic downtown Auburn.

The Keep Auburn Lovely citizen-based group spent the past year advocating to slow and stop the construction set forth in the Auburn Downtown Master Plan. The group found its roots as a response to the planned construction of two 75-foot apartment complexes in the heart of downtown, threatening to alter the overall appearance of the iconic downtown Auburn.

Ray Huff, Auburn realtor and Keep Auburn Lovely member, said, “The storefront character that we have now will be gone. We may have the same stores, but the character will be gone.”

In October of 2011 the City of Auburn adopted a comprehensive land use plan that created an overall goal for Auburn by 2030. Within this plan stemmed the Downtown Master Plan that sought to enhance and develop the downtown area specifically. Forrest Cotton, the planning director for the city of Auburn, said, “When the comprehensive plan was written, we indicated that there was a need to do some special area plans. Downtown was one of those.”

While this plan was edited and approved by both the planning commission and the city council, citizens questioned how much development was needed. According to Keep Auburn Lovely representative Linda Dean, in both 2012 and 2014 the Danter Company conducted research for the City of Auburn showing that the city was overbuilt in multi-unit developments. In both cases no action was taken.

In early 2015, with the near completion of 160 Ross apartments, the Keep Auburn Lovely group formed with a mission to rally citizens to fight to preserve the character of the town. Their

main focus was to take the Danter Report into consideration and request that a seven-month moratorium be placed on development.

“We’re just trying to get them to step back, get all the players involved and just figure out what’s the best plan for everyone,” Huff said.

Keep Auburn Lovely collected 2,221 signatures in favor of the moratorium and came into the August city council meeting with an expectation to discuss it, but they were stopped. “At the meeting immediately before, someone proposed that they remove the ordinance from the agenda because they needed more time to study it. It wasn’t even discussed,” Dean said.

Since that meeting citizens have attended asking if the council is ready to discuss. “Unofficially, the response is we’re not going to consider a moratorium ever,” Huff said. This decision allowed for the continuation of 465-bed multi-unit developments to be proposed and sold on the corners of North College Street and West Glenn as well as the corner of Wright Street and West Glenn, in the heart of the two block downtown Auburn.

Dean said that Keep Auburn Lovely has tried to assure the community that they are not anti-growth. “We are for planned growth,” Dean said.

City Council Member Lynda Tremaine originally approved of the Downtown Master Plan. However looking closer at the fine print, she saw that the buildings would be higher than photographed in the official plan. “I am not against growth. I just think this is out of scale, and it’s out of the character of our town,” Tremaine said.

“Our sweet little town needs advocates and this Keep Auburn Lovely group was never intended to be against the city, it’s for the city,” Tremaine said. Tremaine is a strong supporter of the Keep Auburn Lovely campaign and wants the small town character of Auburn to be

preserved. “It’s amazing how many university towns you go to and it’s a carbon copy, what they’re going through, it’s exactly what the city of Auburn is,” Tremaine said.

The City Planning Commission, however, has still supported the development through the debate with the citizens. “If changing the character means that Auburn isn’t always going to look like it does today then yes,” Cotton said. “But human nature is that when new development is coming, people are, in their minds, going to envision the worst possible outcome but that never turns out to be the case.”

The Keep Auburn Lovely group hopes to continue gaining support and is turning their focus now to the students. “We’ve had a good response from students, but we don’t have it organized,” Huff said. “We have to have students in the public forum, in the paper speaking out.”

Keep Auburn Lovely and the citizens who support it are calling upon the students and the rest of the residents of Auburn to defend the city and take it upon themselves to ensure the town supports all the decisions of the city developers. “We talk about the Auburn spirit as not afraid. Well, I am kind of afraid right now with the Auburn spirit with what might happen,” Tremaine said. “I hate to think that 25-50 years from now we will come and not even recognize what we’ve been so proud of.”

Carter Palek Personality Profile

An Auburn freshman's first callouts consists of a fear of public rejection mixed with a sliver of hope. For the lucky 400 chosen to be in the nine freshman leadership programs these nerves are calmed instantly when they hear their names ring throughout Cater Lawn.

One name not called—Carter William Palek.

“It was probably the first time in my life I didn't get something,” Palek says. The rejection shocked and disappointed Palek, but it is now his favorite Auburn memory.

“It taught me this isn't high school. You aren't just going to get whatever you want. You're in a bigger pond now,” Palek says. “You have to make something happen.” And he did. He made it happen.

Palek is a junior at Auburn University majoring in political science with intent for law school. But beyond academics, Palek is the executive director of Eagle Eye TV, a resident advisor for Teague Hall, Camp War Eagle counselor, High School Leadership Conference counselor and fitness instructor at the Auburn Recreational Center.

“You can tell he is someone that people rally around,” Student Media Advisor Billy Ferris says when talking about Palek's quick sense of humor and outgoing personality.

Palek's ability to relate to and inspire those around him is a main reason for his success in five on-campus organizations.

“I make fun of him for having like 50 jobs on campus,” Student Media Advisor Benjamin Arnberg says. “But he dedicates all of his time to whatever he is doing and really has a vested interest in making it not just good but better than it has been before.”

Palek first heard about Eagle Eye on his Talons Day visit his senior year. “They came and spoke and the girl said she was the position that I am now, the executive director of Eagle Eye TV, and as soon as she said it I was like ‘hmmm, that’s interesting,’” Palek says.

Once he arrived to school Palek sought out Eagle Eye. While denied at his first callouts for Freshman Leadership Program, he was selected as one of two freshmen to be a TV anchor. “They haven’t been able to get rid of me since,” Palek says with a laugh.

As a sophomore Palek took on two leadership roles on Auburn’s campus—marketing director for Eagle Eye and resident adviser for Teague Hall. “My freshman year I had a really good experience with my RAs so I wanted to apply, and it meant I had free housing to basically hang out with people,” Palek says.

At the 2014 RA callouts Palek discovered he would be returning to his freshman dorm, Teague Hall, where he has remained since.

“Everyday is different being an RA,” Palek says. “Some days you won’t do anything and other days you’re at the emergency room at 6:30 a.m. and or you’re speaking to some police officers about a stabbing.”

As an RA Palek chooses to invest in his residents beyond being the go-to call in an emergency. Dorothy Dickmann, Palek’s co-RA in the Upper Quad says, “He enjoys creating relationships with his residents, sometimes as much as hanging with us. He’s good at being forceful without being mean and is forceful when it matters.”

Palek carries this leadership style into his continued work with Eagle Eye TV and now serves as the station manager and executive director.

“Carter is a great leader because you can tell he’s building a community not just to do it but because he actually wants it to be a community and a group of friends,” Ferris says.

Eagle Eye's close-knit, enjoyable culture is in large part due to Palek's execution of his motto to "bring an element of play to everything you do."

"I remember the first couple of Eagle Eye meetings," Auburn Cottle, the news director at Eagle Eye says. "He always was the one to say a funny joke in the middle of the meeting."

According to Arnberg, membership and viewing in Eagle Eye has soared the past two years and much of the credit is given to Palek.

"Once he became marketing director last year, our social media following quadrupled and more," Arnberg says. "He completely revamped the way Eagle Eye markets itself, taking the station out of the studio to where students can see it."

While Palek invests a large chunk of his time in Eagle Eye and his residents, he continues his involvement in High School Leadership Conference, Camp War Eagle and working at the Auburn Recreational Center.

"You just have to be smart with your time," Palek says. "Sometimes I'm in class and think 'I'm not really learning a lot' so I'll send some emails and use it as an office hour."

According to his co-workers in Eagle Eye, his involvement is vital to the station's success.

"It makes him hard to pin down sometimes," Arnberg says. "But in some ways it makes his job better because when you're that involved and working for a news organization you have a finger on the pulse of what's happening on campus."

While Palek works tirelessly throughout his week to ensure all his responsibilities are completed, he somehow makes it seem effortless.

"The reason he is able to pull it all off is because he is such a likeable person. He genuinely cares about the people he is friends with and has strong relationships with them," Dickmann

says. “That means he can get a little more leeway at points because people trust him to get it done. He is incredibly good at getting things done.”

Palek’s days are filled with an impressive balance of hard work and an enjoyment of life, qualities his coworkers feed off of.

“He has what some people call an ‘it factor’ or charisma,” Ferris says. “Any good leader has that. So they respond to him, they work hard for him and they have a good impression of him when they leave.”

On The Tracks

In a small art gallery along the streets of downtown Opelika, Alabama, where citizens visit with wine glasses barely full and cheese and crackers stuffed in their mouths, Taylor Donelson stands laughing with his wife on a double date.

“Did you know this place used to be a brothel and saloon back in the day?” Donelson, 25, says. “I was just talking about it with that woman over there pouring the wine. Never would have imagined a brothel to be in a place like Opelika and in the heart of downtown nevertheless.”

The group of four wonders out after finishing their cups of dark red liquid and continues left towards the next stop on the trail.

Twice a year the citizens of Opelika and Auburn exchange \$25 for a small wine glass and wristband to attend the biannual On the Tracks food and wine festival hosted by the local businesses of downtown Opelika.

“We asked ourselves how to get people in the stores and not simply in the streets at an event,” Pam Powers-Smith, the director of Opelika Main Street says. “We thought ‘food and wine!’ And that’s how On the Tracks began, having wine tastings in the stores.”

The On the Tracks festival started 11 years ago by Opelika Main Street, a nonprofit organization that focuses on historical preservation and promotion of local Opelika businesses.

“Our mission is to get people downtown, and that’s our goal with On the Tracks,” Powers-Smith says. “Businesses like it. They like seeing new people because it’s exciting when someone walks into the store for the first time. And not only is it good for the owner, but then for the customers as well, forming a deeper relationship.”

The night of the festival, the 24 participating stores open their doors and welcome people in to have meaningful but still lighthearted conversations with possible customers over small glasses of local wine.

“It is incredibly helpful to us with marketing,” Leah Mayer, an employee at The Gallery says. “We are a decently small store that may be looked over at first glance, but this event brings people to our store in a social setting and allows us to become more personable with customers.”

Since its start 21 nights have been dedicated to On the Tracks festivals, and each year more citizens walk the streets filled with live music and chatter, gaining a deeper understanding for the hidden gems of their small town.

At this year’s festival groups and individuals alike mingle from store to store along the train tracks that run through downtown and begin the trail stops. Further on the trail, in a record store stands three women in their 30s laughing at a joke told by a fellow trail participant. Of these three, one woman lives permanently in Opelika and the other two are simply visiting their best friend from college.

“As someone who lives here it’s something to look forward to outside of the college town,” Emily Bowling, Opelika resident says. “It is a fun night in a small town to go out with your friends in a young-adult setting.”

The girl’s night out turns from fancy to fun as glasses are finished and conversations flourish. However, while those attending enjoy the slow paced night on the town, there is a small representation from Auburn University students.

“I feel like it isn’t advertised a ton to students because they try to keep it low key and charming for the permanent citizens of town,” Bowling says.

Those students in attendance join the parade of people and learn more of the small town just 30 minutes up the road.

“From a college student’s perspective, it’s a great deal for what you get,” Emily Cragon, 21, says. “It shows that if you want to be a young adult there are events available. It’s really trying to bring life to the area beyond the typical college bars.”

With stores ranging from small record shops to galleries to salons, those participating experience the rich culture hidden in the streets of central Alabama.

“On the Tracks really uplifts the culture and brings people in the community together,” Mayer says. “Who doesn’t get happy when they have a little wine and snacks?”

Over the past five years On the Tracks has gained enough support to attract tourist from surrounding areas with both nights selling out days before the event.

“We don’t necessarily focus on any one group because we’d love for anyone to come,” Powers-Smith says. “What we have noticed over the last five years is people coming from out of town which makes me happy because that means tourism is increasing.”

Although hugely successful, the workers of Opelika Main Street still hope to see their events grow and continue to help downtown Opelika.

“In the future I would like to add VIP tastings so you would have a ticket that is more expensive but then you’d get to taste wines that are really hard to find,” Powers-Smith says.

“Then honestly, I think it’s going to grow so much that we may have to do it more than twice a year. We have so many stores participating so we may break it up in the future. I don’t want stores to be missed.”

The culture of Opelika shines through in these nights filled with wine and food. However more importantly, relationships are formed ensuring consistent business for the local stores that make up the trail.

“It’s important to our local culture to encourage people to buy from our local stores, eat in our local restaurants, etc.,” Powers-Smith says. “Yes, we’re a small town from central Alabama but we have great food and wines. Normally people think they’ll drive to Atlanta for this but now they just have to drive up the road to experience a rich culture. It tells folks that are unfamiliar with downtown Opelika all that we have to offer.”