



# Mark Fargo: A Poet on the Road

By Kori Wood '19

**Mark Fargo '10** (Santa Barbara, MA in Education, Leadership & Social Justice) rides a motorcycle, but off line he has no interest in Harley Davidsons or Sturgis. His personal motto is *non solum iter*: I travel alone. Although he only started riding when he was sixty, Fargo has already traveled all over the country, clocking in over 140,000 miles in just seven years. In that time, he has published three chapbooks documenting his travels by combining photo and Haiku. Part Beat poet and part motorcyclist, Fargo is not a biker. He is a Moto Poet.

“It seems like now I ride through a hundred small towns every trip,” Fargo says. “I ride through the off-the-beaten-path kind of places now—a lot of those two lanes. You know, where they just go on for hours, and I don’t see anybody. For me, there’s nothing that makes me happier.”





The wolf on Fargo's gas tank, *Lobo Solitario*, represents his mindset and travel ideology.



Fargo presents a BASC scholarship in 2015. | Photos courtesy of Mark Fargo

Fargo's story starts long before his days as a Moto Poet. In another life, he was a teacher. As with most of Fargo's journeys, the road to his career as an educator was anything but typical. By his own words, he was a late bloomer, landing his first teaching job in his mid-forties.

"I don't think I would have had the patience of maturity to do it when I was younger, to be honest," he laughs. "I'm glad that I waited to do it."

As an educator, Fargo was a Jack Kerouac-type amongst his colleagues. He had a soft spot for the students who considered themselves outsiders and nonconformists—ones that didn't really fit into any clubs. Fargo saw that these kids needed a safe space to express themselves. So he started Beatnik Nation, a literary group and a club for the misfits.

"It was the smallest club in the school," Fargo laughs. "My colleagues probably thought, 'Oh, what's Fargo doing now? He's got kids reading poetry at lunch in the quad?'"

But for Fargo's students, Beatnik Nation wasn't just about hanging out and reading poetry at lunchtime. The group did public performances and readings. Fargo encouraged each student to leave the comfort zone of high school and experience the real world.

After a decade inside the classroom, Fargo started to feel stuck. So at fifty-six, he decided to go back to school to get his master's degree. At the start of the fall quarter, Fargo visited the Antioch University Santa Barbara campus to see what the program was all about. It turned out to be a perfect match.

"And then they told me, 'Oh yeah, and your first class starts in two hours,'" he laughs. "I just kind of embraced the idea that I needed to do this."

Fargo started working toward his master's degree that very day. It wasn't easy, he says, but Fargo has never been one to travel the well-worn road. He's always been a leader and doesn't back down from the battle. While he worked on his thesis, Fargo started the BASC Foundation, a scholarship fund for kids who were interested in something that didn't need a four-year degree.

This was during the "College for All" era, and a scholarship aimed at nontraditional education for students wasn't a popular idea. Fargo managed all the fundraising on his own, and maintaining the scholarship was an uphill battle.

"But this *was* the social justice and leadership I'd been learning about, Fargo says. We weren't really giving kids the opportunity to pursue their own careers. We were telling them they *have* to go to college.

Fargo raised \$30,000 and maintained the BASC scholarship for seven years until his retirement in 2016 after twenty years of service, three at the California Youth Authority and seventeen in public schools.

These days, Fargo is on to a new chapter in his life: road trips. When he is on the road, he is strictly a photographer and haiku writer. He isn't interested in capturing the iconic photo. He doesn't get off his bike unless he finds something interesting.

"A lot of my friends who travel will ask, where was that shot? Well, it was five minutes outside of the national park. Because no one thinks about that, they go right into the national park," he says.

For Mark Fargo, life happens on the stretch of road between the photos. ■