

| DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH |

Freelance Writer and Photographer,
Detroit, Michigan



Jim Griffioen is a writer, photographer, and community activist at the forefront in the reinvention and revitalization of Detroit. A 1999 Western Michigan University Department of English graduate, Jim went on to receive his J.D. at the University of Michigan Law School. Following several years practicing law as a corporate litigator in San Francisco, Jim and his wife relocated to Detroit, where they now live, work, and raise their children.

Since his career shift, Jim has become one of the most recognized and poignant chroniclers of contemporary Detroit—both through his popular blog, Sweet-Juniper.com, and through his photography, advocacy, and writing. He has been interviewed and featured on venues including NPR, BBC, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, The Rachel Maddow Show, and multiple other local, regional, and national outlets. His photography has been seen in *Time*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, and many others. “Feral Houses,” a photo-essay of buildings being overtaken by nature, has received national attention. Oprah.com has featured Jim in a column titled, “What Inspires the Most Creative People We Know” and profiled his creativity.

His written voice—like his photos—is clear and humanistic. Where others see only decay, he is able to see beauty. He is not reporting on Detroit—he is reporting in it—and living it. His powerful photo essays provide context, empathy, and hope while chronicling current decay and past mistakes—abandoned schools, prairies that were once thriving neighborhoods, and other similar scenes. In *Sweet-Juniper*, he intimately chronicles his own family’s life and all the joys and adventures that they have in a supposedly ruined city—building crafts, exploring vacant lots, and embarking on trips throughout town. In doing so, he provides a powerful counter-narrative to the stories of bankruptcy, corruption, and neglect portrayed in national and international media.

James
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