

TEEN AND ADULT WRITERS FLOURISH, THANKS TO THE LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON FOUNDATION

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WRITE ON





Write On

TEEN AND ADULT WRITERS FLOURISH, THANKS TO
THE LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON FOUNDATION

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG HILLS



The foundation's mission is to preserve the poet's home and develop today's writers. Tours of the home are offered every Saturday in season from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

The Laura (Riding) Jackson Foundation honors the late poet by developing today's writers. Established in 1991 to preserve Jackson's home and literature, in 2000 the nonprofit expanded its focus to offer seasonal programs for a new generation of writers: teenagers.

During a lunch meeting 16 years ago, foundation board member Charlotte Terry and college admissions counselor Pam Proctor pooled their resources. "Charlotte had a passion for literature and spreading culture in Vero Beach," says Proctor. "My thing was to help kids find a 'hook' for their college applications." At the time, Proctor was a consultant for the International Baccalaureate program at Sebastian River High School; and she noticed that while many teens wanted to be writers, none had been published or knew how to go about it. "I thought, 'These kids need a venue to show off their talents,'" she explains.

In July of 2000, the foundation held its first Teen Writers Workshop featuring novelist David Hagberg on the

porch of the Laura (Riding) Jackson home. "The night before it had rained and there were mosquitoes all over, so we were all swabbing ourselves in mosquito repellent," recalls Proctor. "We were afraid the kids would never come back, but they all came back. After that we realized we needed to have an indoor venue." From then on, the three-hour workshops were held in an Environmental Learning Center (ELC) classroom.

At each workshop the first hour is devoted to a speaker, usually a journalist, novelist or poet. During the second hour the teens are "draped all over the ELC getting inspired by that venue." In the last hour, those who want to can present their writing to their peers. Since the first class with Hagberg and 20 brave teenagers, the foundation has held three to five workshops per year, sometimes enrolling more than 100 adolescents per session. Teens who attend three workshops become writing "fellows," an additional honor to add to their college applications and a motivator to stay focused.



HOME SWEET HOME

The mission of the Laura (Riding) Jackson foundation is twofold: "to preserve and interpret the home of poet Laura (Riding) Jackson and promote literary programs that nurture passion for the written word."

"The home was bequeathed to the Foundation for preservation and restoration and as a focal point for the study of literature, philosophy and history. The home is an example of a disappearing architectural style and a symbol of an older, more environmentally sensitive way of life.

In this simple home, one can feel the former owners' devotion to literature and the study of language, and appreciate their great love for what Laura called 'the Floridian way of life,' which allowed them simplicity, privacy, and peace."

Laura (Riding) Jackson's home was moved to the campus of the Environmental Learning Center in Wabasso.

Emma Woodward, a sophomore in college, became a writing fellow after taking three workshops over the course of her sophomore and junior years at Vero Beach High School. "I went to hear from adult writers that were doing things in the world of literature and English and had published things," says Woodward. As a result of the workshops, she was published in *Vero Beach Magazine*.

The most helpful workshop she took was on writing college essays and applications, but they were "all beneficial in one way or another. Sometimes I was able to use what the guest was telling us about right away, and others were more holistically helpful."

Quinn Hiaasen, a sophomore at Vero Beach High School and the son of journalist Carl Hiaasen, also found the essay writing class the most beneficial. "Even if you learn these same principles and concepts in the schools, you get more one-on-one attention in the workshops," he points out. Quinn has been published in several local magazines.

I have waited for the breath of life
 And the breath of speech to mingle.
 This must come about first in the mind.
 We must think our way into our station
 Of watchkeeper on the universe,
 Upon the life-whole of it.
 It is the station of speech.
 Here the promise of language
 will be proved.

– FROM “IN GRATUITOUS WITNESS”
 BY LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON



COURTESY OF THE LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON FOUNDATION



Laura (Riding) Jackson's slippers
 still lay beside her bed.

COURTESY OF THE LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON FOUNDATION



A vintage photograph
 shows Laura (Riding)
 Jackson's home library as it
 looked in her time.

COURTESY OF THE LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON FOUNDATION

The teen writing program is one of four in the country, says Marie Steifel, current president of the Laura (Riding) Jackson Foundation. Like Proctor, she's excited about the opportunities the workshops provide for teens. "Because we try to bring in very fine teachers, it gets the kids excited about writing again," says Steifel. "You get a teenager who's happy about writing a sonnet, and it can't get any better than that."

"What I really love is that once students realize they have a 'hook,' something special to offer, they get incredible confidence that carries over into other areas of their life," says Proctor. "If you can give young people a sense they can do this, it's not a mystery; it's an acquired skill. Hopefully they can put it into practice and start writing for themselves."

The Teen Writers Workshop model has been replicated in a series of creative writing workshops at Hanoi

University in Vietnam and at the Indian River Correctional Institute. "The model has worked among teen felons, overseas in Hanoi," says Proctor. "It's all about empowering students to be confident in their creative abilities."

The teen workshops have always been free. At first everyone, including the instructors, volunteered their time. Then the foundation was able to get a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts that allowed them to pay the featured writers a nominal fee.

Each year the foundation also brings in the Cambridge American State Theatre, students from Cambridge University in England who give two performances as well as provide acting and literary workshops. Founded by actress Judi Dench to give students at Cambridge University theater experience, the program features 19 college students who tour nine American schools. "We're the only high school program they visit," says Steifel.

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This back view of the Laura (Riding) Jackson home reflects the Cracker architecture of environmentally sensitive Florida homes of the past, with the kitchen as a separate small building behind the main house.

While the nonprofit has also reached aspiring adult writers through its signature Poetry and Barbeque event in April and through an adult writers' group that meets on the porch of the Laura (Riding) Jackson home on the second Saturday of each month, it wasn't until this year that the foundation began offering a comparable adult workshop program.

Julie Weary, one of the "Porchwriters" who became a foundation board member, noticed that while the teen writing programs were successful, there was a gap in Vero Beach when it came to adult writing. "I was surprised because in this area I think it's so vital," says Weary. "Everyone seems

so intelligent; I don't imagine they're sitting around watching soap operas and game shows. It's like, 'if you build it, they will come.'"

Weary noted that while the foundation had offered a few adult workshops over the years, they had never offered anything consistent. "The Laura (Riding) Jackson Foundation is growing and it's our hope that we end up being the go-to organization for teens and adult writers. You've got the theatre, you've got the museum, but for adult writers there really isn't anything," she says.

In November the first workshop of a four-part series, about "writing a killer mystery," had 20 participants. "I



The keepers of Laura's literary flame. From top: Foundation board members Rene VanDeVoorde, John Hilton, Sean Sexton, Charlotte Terry, Julie Weary, Nancy Offutt, Marie Stiefel and Susan Boyd, with administrative assistant Susan Jaramillo



The Porchwriters, an adult writing group, meets on the porch of the house on the second Saturday of each month. Here a tour begins at the front of the home.

didn't get the idea they were dabbling," says Weary of the adult writers. "They were serious writers who needed a little bit of encouragement." Like their teenage counterparts, many adult writers aren't sure how to get published or lack the confidence to take their writing to the next level.

Weary is excited about the upcoming adult workshops. In January, Brogran Sullivan presents "Straight on 'Til Morning: World-Building in Science Fiction & Fantasy." The award-winning author will speak on how to find inspiration, how to create aliens and monsters, and how to use magic, science and technology. In March Suzanne Fox presents the "Effortless Memoir." Fox will teach the keys to planning, shaping, writing, revising and how to conquer doubts and blocks. In April, Steve Bradbury offers "Polishing that Poem: An Informal Workshop on Editing for Power." He will demonstrate five ways to strengthen your poetry. Adult workshops cost \$45 each. ☼

UPCOMING ADULT WORKSHOPS

BROGAN SULLIVAN: *Straight on 'Til Morning: World-Building in Science Fiction & Fantasy*
January 7, 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

SUZANNE FOX: *Effortless Memoir*
March 4, 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

STEVE BRADBURY: *Polishing that Poem: An Informal Workshop on Editing for Power*
April 1, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

UPCOMING TEEN WORKSHOPS

BROGAN SULLIVAN: *Teen Writers Speculative Fiction*
January 7, 1-4 p.m.

CARL HIASSEN: *Teen Humor Writing*
February 25, 1-4 p.m.

KEN HART: *Teen Writers Poetry*
April 1, 1-4 p.m.

To register for a class, visit www.lauraridingjackson.com or call 772-569-6718.