

JEANNE FINLEY

January 4, 1998

Prof. Donald Faulkner, Associate Director
New York State Writers Institute
Humanities 355, University at Albany
Albany, NY 12222

Dear Don,

I am writing this letter to express my appreciation for being included in the LeAnne Schreiber workshop this past fall, and to tell you what a good workshop it was.

LeAnne was a spectacularly articulate and perceptive teacher; her critiques of our work unflinchingly went straight to both the strengths and weaknesses of each piece, and she always offered cogent suggestions for improvement. (I'm sure this has been echoed by all the other participants). Her "take" on each piece was offered in a spirit of both "safety" (for our psyches) and understanding of what we were trying to accomplish. Most participants were working in a fusion of genres, as the workshop title "Crossing the Boundaries" suggested; and in my case, I was able to produce, in addition to work on a novel, work on a slightly fictionalized memoir that had been static for several years. LeAnne's perspective and critical eye as a journalist (and currently, as a fiction writer) were invaluable, since she was easily able to understand and guide us all through these boundaries.

My novel turned out to have the "wrong" narrator--a big problem. But I didn't know that before I went into the workshop, nor did I know how to fix it. Now I know both, and I wouldn't have known either until LeAnne and the workshop showed me both how and why.

Also, I learned a great deal about how to teach a workshop from having been taught by LeAnne. I listened, read and critiqued in the workshop with a "double eye", since I also teach fiction writing. I learned so much from her methods of drawing us out on why we wrote a particular section; what critical approaches might be appropriate for each of us; and her uncanny sense of what each participant was trying to accomplish in his/her work. I see now that my own critical sense has been sharpened and honed by exposure to *her* critical sense; and I now see how to apply this knowledge to my own students' work. I can't remember taking a workshop, either in graduate school or out, where my critical skills required such acuity, and I'm very grateful to have given them such a workout.

Finally, the group as whole cohered as a supportive, intense workshop. This is something that happens only occasionally, in my experience, but when it does, it's as much a supportive force as the criticism offered. We joked to LeAnne that we'd better be good, since she'd hand-picked us all; but I think part of the reason we cohered so well as a group was due to her own skill and obvious enjoyment at teaching us. You of course know that we have all decided to continue on as a writer's group, and it's because of you, LeAnne and the Writers Institute that the fortunes (and productivity) of this group of writers will continue at all. If you ever are considering a writer-in-residence on a more permanent basis for the Institute, or even just another season-long workshop, I know I echo the other participants in hoping (demanding?) that you consider LeAnne for the residency. A writer of such accomplishment, and a teacher of such obvious skill (and a "local" person to boot) is quite a resource, and I hope you can find a way to "make her available" again.

And thanks again for the opportunity to have improved my work so much!

Sincerely,

