

September 18, 2017

Dear Fellow Writers,

Yesterday, I finished teaching a four-day silent writing workshop with my friend Natalie Goldberg (*Writing Down the Bones*) at Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe. I promise I won't use the word Dharma or Buddha Nature too much, but the combination of silence, writing, practice and the study of craft in three very different books (*A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid; *Kitchen Confidential*, Anthony Bourdain; *My Name is Lucy Barton*, Elizabeth Strout) made for a remarkable week. That is my goal for our time together: a combination of filling pages while studying craft and technique in a supportive atmosphere. It's that simple. I've been thinking a lot about marrying the many lessons in practice I've learned teaching with Natalie and the craft and technique issues discussed in graduate school and as a working writer. I've been looking forward to building that bridge for a long time.

This is a studio class focused on creative production, so expect to write copiously and expansively, using prompts as jumping-off points and experimenting with ways to shed new light on our work. The advantage of this online, not-for-credit format is its flexibility. Regardless of your length of experience or level of expertise, this course has the potential to be as demanding as you want it to be—or as gently inviting. If you're ready to turn up the heat on your writing practice and generate serious new material, you can push yourself to respond to each daily prompt and follow up with the more promising starts, dive into the craft discussions, read the optional selections, share your work with the group, and offer useful feedback to the other writers' work. Conversely, if you're looking for a way to gradually re-energize your writing (or to embark on a new dream), you can select among activities and set a pace that feels right to you.

We write by ourselves, but the support and mutual enthusiasm of a dependable group with a common aim can encourage and inspire us. The only obligation you have, signing up for this class, is to exercise a conscious generosity toward the group. We're putting our most vulnerable selves out there in our work, and we need it to be received with care and consideration. With luck, you'll meet others whose work resonates with your own and who may be amenable—should you wish it—to creating independent critique partnerships or small groups that extend beyond the eight week class session. My role, as I see it, is to set the tone, provide the thematic framework and organizational structure for the group, and hold the space for each of you to do your best work. I'll share my insights as a working writer via craft talks, and post relevant readings that demonstrate masterful command of narrative technique. Each weekday I'll offer a writing prompt related to that week's narrative element. I'll respond to your work, and coax and goad you to explore the paths that arise for you. You put in the time, energy, and courage to write, read, and respond. By the end of the session, I you'll have surprised yourself with the quality and quantity you've produced.

I look forward to working with each of you and reading your work.

Robert Wilder