

Published December 13th, 2017

## Diablo Writers' Workshop inspires Lamorinda writers

By Kara Navolio



From left: Andrea Firth and Janine de Boisblanc  
Photo provided

Andrea Firth of Moraga and Janine de Boisblanc of Lafayette met in 2013 while working on their MFAs in Creative Non-Fiction from Saint Mary's College. Both authors pursued their degrees in order to hone their craft and tell their stories. Firth has written a collection of personal essays while de Boisblanc is writing a coming-of-age memoir. They both had a passion to help other writers tell their stories as well.

"Lamorinda is a very literary community," explained Firth, "with the great libraries, book stores and other literary programs. But the writing element was missing." Many writers travel to Berkeley and Oakland or other locations west of the tunnel for writing groups or classes. The two women decided to start Diablo Writers' Workshop in March and began teaching classes at Orinda Books and at Firth's writing studio in Moraga.

The classes, which nurture new writers and also help foster the careers of more experienced writers, meet for four to six weeks and focus on writing from life experience for whatever genre works best for each writer, whether memoir, fiction, personal essay or poetry. They employ the workshop method learned in graduate school where students read their work out loud and peers and instructors both give positive, constructive feedback. "If you do the workshop right," added de Boisblanc, "people feel good and supported even if they may have a list of things to work on."

Student Lauren Matthews of Orinda agreed. "I've gained confidence in my voice, my passion, and my ability to edit and refine my work. Janine has taken the essence of an MFA program (read everything, write often, workshop) and distilled it into a weekly class that is at once challenging and approachable."

Many of the students return for multiple sessions to continue working on their skills in the supportive environment. "I am currently enrolled in a second session of Learn from the Masters," added Lynda Sauer of Orinda. "Andrea is an excellent teacher who provides focused instruction tailored to each individual writer. I have found her class format, which combines discussion and analysis of contemporary writers with opportunities to workshop students' writing, useful and inspiring. She provides a warm, supportive atmosphere in her comfortable writing studio and fosters a sense of community. All of the students in our last class have enrolled in a second or third session and some of us have attended lectures and readings together outside of class." They keep the class size small, about six to 10 students, to keep the group intimate. "I am inspired by the bond the writers develop with each other," de Boisblanc stated of the small group format. "It's wonderful to witness people coming together, helping each other."

Those looking for inspiration need only ask student Monica Brar of Alamo. "It has been a fantastic experience. She (de Boisblanc) is an excellent teacher, always providing instruction on the craft of writing, a nurturing environment in which to share my work, encouragement and praise regarding what I am doing well, and constructive advice to take my work to the next level. Having the accountability of a weekly class has forced me to carve out the time in my busy day to do something that I enjoy deeply, and I have written some of my best work in this class."

All of their fall classes are full, but new classes will begin in January. Firth and de Boisblanc, who also offer one-on-one consulting and editing services, have plans to expand their offerings in 2018. They hope to add student readings and writing retreats to the mix.

"We are pleased to bring this outlet to the East Bay," said Firth.

To find out about upcoming classes, visit [www.diablowriters.org](http://www.diablowriters.org).

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA