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LA VIDA



WRITER'S BOOT CAMP

... with dessert. *The Writing Pad* promises gain without the pain

BY LINDA IMMEDIATO

Wednesday, July 5, 2006 - 12:00 pm



It's 7 p.m., you've just gotten home from a long day at work and you warily eye the laptop that contains your unfinished short story or script. You wish you could find the motivation to finish; instead you turn on the television.

What you need is the kind of push you'd get from a fitness trainer. You start fantasizing about writer's boot camp. Not some sterile classroom — who wants to sit in a butt-numbing metal chair for three hours when you're tired and hungry? Wouldn't you rather lie back on a comfy sofa in a little cottage, maybe with a garden view beyond the glass doors to inspire you and lavender-soy candles sending their floral scent through the room? And wouldn't it be cool if someone greeted you with a cup of hot tea when you arrived, and then fed you a dinner and matched you up with a partner who would help nudge you into finishing your writing goal for the week? Maybe even give you constructive feedback on what you've written so far?

"It's boot camp without the steel toe," says instructor Marilyn Friedman. (Photo by Terence Patrick)

Enter *The Writing Pad*, where classes really are held in a cozy Silver Lake cottage with soft chairs, that comfy sofa and a garden where you can scribble among the grass, fruit trees and flowers. There's hot

jasmine tea — or cold peach tea, if you prefer — and there are tasting plates. Tonight, it's warm arugula salad with bacon, balsamic dressing, Parmesan and pine nuts; then asparagus crostini with *romesco* sauce and Gruyère; and, for dessert, miniature "mile-high" strawberry pies.

Hard to believe they call this boot camp. But as host and instructor Marilyn Friedman explains, "It's boot camp without the steel toe." Friedman had been a part of the San Francisco writing-salon scene for years until her husband, a character technical director, was offered a job with Disney here in Los Angeles. They relocated and Friedman now spends time at Disney too— teaching classes in the evening through their Artist Development program.

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Friedman explains why she created the *Writing Pad*— "I wanted a positive environment," she says, "a place where people feel comfortable. That really encourages creativity." Her



FRIDAY



SATURDAY



SUNDAY

Calendar Listings

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WHERE TO EAT NOW

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This Month At A Glance

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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Event or Venue

ROCKIE HOROSCOPE

COMICS

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groups consist of no more than 10 people who are thoughtfully screened before being accepted. Then they are given a set of instructions: No negative feedback is allowed. Comments to other writers should consist only of what the readers "like and remember." Members are also enlisted into the "You Police," which means they enforce the rule that the word "you" is never used in critiques. Phrases like "the narrator" or "the character" are better. Friedman says this is one more way she makes the Writing Pad a safe place by separating the writer from the subject matter.

The food was really just a hobby of Friedman's that she's taken to another level. She's always loved baking and counts Ruth Reichl, the best-selling author, restaurant critic and *Gourmet* magazine editor in chief, as one of her writing idols. Friedman even hands out excerpts from Reichl's novel *Garlic and Sapphires* to her students.

"She blends my two passions," says Friedman, "food and writing. I guess I wanted to do the same with my class."

The desserts are made from scratch by Friedman, and the savories come from Susan Yoon, a self-taught chef and caterer, as well as a writer and founder of the blog immaeatyou.blogspot.com.

But where does the boot-camp part come in? Is anyone gonna kick your ass into finishing that script or that novel? Friedman says her in-class exercises "help keep you limber, help you exercise your inner critic and, like any basic training, stretch your writing muscles." The class is goal oriented, which means you're paired up with a partner, almost as if you were at the gym, and together you help each other complete your goals — ultimately, 30 pages of a script or book by the end of six weeks.

This all sounded so good I had to give it a try. True to Friedman's word, I didn't break a sweat the entire time, the food was terrific and the other writers were really good — and helpful. In the end, this wasn't the kind of punishing class that leaves you sore. It was more like Weight Watchers for writers. But a lot more delicious.

The Writing Pad, www.writingpad.com. Six-week class, with meal \$250. (323) 644-0779.



PREVIOUSLY IN LA VIDA

WASTE NOT, CRUNCH NOT

Wednesday, July 19, 2006 - 12:00 pm

LOOK HOT, STAY COOL

Wednesday, July 12, 2006 - 12:00 pm

SUNSHINE STATES

Wednesday, July 12, 2006 - 12:00 pm

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ALSO BY LINDA IMMEDIATO

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Wednesday, July 12, 2006 - 12:00 pm

WRITER'S BOOT CAMP

Wednesday, July 5, 2006 - 12:00 pm

THE LITTLE DRESS THAT COULD

Wednesday, June 21, 2006 - 12:00 pm

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