

I'm writing to you in behalf of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, an organization to which I've been variously, and vitally, attached for nearly thirty-five years -- in essence for my entire writing life. I came to Squaw Valley in 1970, as a mildly promising, 26-year old graduate-student writer. At Squaw I found the novelists Oakley Hall and Peter Matthiessen, both of whom took an interest in what I was rather feebly writing, responded to it articulately, encouraged me, let me know I possibly wasn't wasting my time, and that they each would go on taking an interest were I to continue. And each of them, indeed, lived up that promise -- for years to come and in myriad ways. It's easy to say...well, that's what they were there for. But the truth is -- and this what I take to be Squaw Valley's claim, to eminence -- they actually did what they said they would; they took time out of from their writing lives, they made that kind of generosity seem normal, they exhibited no cynicism or even skepticism about one's (my) chance to make a go of being of writer. My continued involvement with Squaw Valley over these subsequent decades has been to carry on being a part of that untainted good mission. Oakley Hall is now gone, Peter's old, *I am old*. But as a faculty member, a Board member; a visitor; I have witnessed The Community of Writers through all its years; and I have seen nothing but the persistent pursuit and furtherance of Oakley and Peter's rather beatific spirit -- applying intelligent; intense interest to the work of young (and sometimes not so young) writers, providing encouragements, telling the truth, and being around afterward (crucially) when early promise faces the 2nd-act stresses of actually doing what it is it you say you want to do. These matters are never completely clear, but I think I couldn't have had a writing life at all without the clean start I got at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. And that's why I've stuck around all these years -- trying to have a hand in some other young writer's beginnings. It has seemed to me that Squaw Valley was the right place to do that.

-Richard Ford