

I owe hugely to the Squaw Valley Community of Writers. I, an aspiring unpublished writer, never took a creative writing course in school or college (don't have an MFA)—there weren't any in my day. In 1963, I became an English teacher and early-on developed an interest in writing fiction of my own. Around that starting time, The Famous Writers School in Westport, Connecticut, was running full-page ads in the major magazines. I signed up, paid my hard-earned money, and like probably most of my fellow "students," didn't finish my assignments. Right then, Jessica Mitford, the famous muckraker wrote a famous article in the *Atlantic* called "Let Us Now Praise Famous Writers" pointing out that my "School" was pretty much a total scam, thus ending (or putting on hold) my burgeoning writing aspirations.

That was 1970, and I had young Barnaby Conrad in one of my 11th grade English classes. That spring, at a parents' conference, Barnaby the elder told me that he and some San Francisco pals were starting a writing conference at Squaw Valley, and since my family and I spent summers at our cabin at Lake Tahoe, I ought to join them. So I signed up, becoming a charter student, and it changed my life.

For three summers, 1970 to 1972, I joined a community of not-so-famous writers and pretty much honed my skills and ambitions and began a life-long dedication to and love of writing fiction. During one of the summers, writer Max Steel singled out one of the short pieces I wrote in his course, and Barnaby published it in an anthology—my first ink!

I continued teaching English and writing during my vacations, but had no success with publishing, in spite of endless submissions. One of the projects I began then was a time-travel novel about *fin-de-siècle* Vienna I plugged away on, draft after draft, for thirty (!) years. I stopped going to Squaw Valley after three summers only because I figured I didn't want to be a perpetual unpublished wannabe.

Then in 2008 a miracle happened. Dutton, a major NYC house, "discovered" my 30-year much-revised Vienna novel and bought it for a **huge** amount of money. It came out, was reviewed some 40 times, made the NYT bestseller list, and got me invited as a teacher to schools and numerous writers conferences, now as a successful author don't you know? I already knew how to be an effective (and inspiring!) teacher. And I began talking about my homage to Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey formula (my advanced degree), valuable stuff for aspiring writers.

Thinking back on it, I owe a debt to the fraudulent Famous Writers School, yes (it got me started), but mostly to Barnaby and Max Steele and Blair Fuller and Oakley Hall and all the real writers in those first years of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers.

Selden Edwards, 2019