

# LEARNING WRITING AT WRITESPACE

Jamie Danielle Portwood on the  
Importance of Community

I met Dr. Holly Ordway and Writespace on the same day, at HBU's 2015 Spring Writers' Conference. I was new to Houston and my friend had invited me to come with her as she knew I was trying to be a writer. At the conference, I took a flyer about upcoming workshops at a little literary arts organization called Writespace and I took a workshop on memoir since I was working on a memoir. Actually, it felt more like banging my head against a memoir, but my friend was game so we sat ourselves in the front seats at Dr. Holly Ordway's workshop on writing memoir.

I remember the conversation my friend and I were having. I had announced that one should never say never as God surely considers it a dare.

"I mean, here I am in Houston after swearing I would never live in Texas. I swore it on nearly every one of those 879 miles of I-10 that exist in the state

of Texas on the drive between my mom in Florida and college in Arizona.”

There was a flash of humor and kindred spirit from Dr. Ordway as she laughed and winked at me. “Oh is that ever true! Remind me to tell you how a former atheist turned Christian converted to Catholicism while teaching at a Baptist university.” I knew I was in for a good workshop because a teacher who can laugh is one I know I will love.

That workshop in 2015 was only an hour. Honestly, I don’t even remember what she taught about memoir. But in 2016, when I took on the job as workshop coordinator at Writespace and we needed a memoir instructor, I wanted Dr. Ordway.

I wanted her particularly because she is one of those teachers who not only loves to teach but is also permanently curious and passionate about the subject they are teaching. That kind of passion and energy are contagious and I wanted to have each student come away from a Writespace workshop filled with new energy.

It’s why I always ask instructors if there is a subject they are particularly geeked to teach. Given the fact that she is one of the world’s foremost Tolkien and Lewis scholars, I was not at all surprised that both were a part of her pitch. I *was* surprised that it wasn’t a memoir workshop.

Collaboration and Creativity was a workshop that used the Inklings to illustrate how important community is for a writer, especially for writers engaged in long-term writing projects. For some reason, I took the trope of the melancholy, starving artist too seriously. I had this idea that writing had to be done alone — that it was supposed to be hard and lonely. Learning from Dr. Ordway that Tolkien — and understand, I read *The Lord of the Rings* once a year — that Lewis — *The Chronicles of Narnia* are almost memorized because I read them *at least* once a year — hung out regularly over pints in the local pub and collaborated creatively changed the landscape of writing for me. Her workshop gave me permission to seek out a community to write in. Being a part of a writing community changed everything for me.

I mean, I still haven't finished my memoir, but I haven't thrown the whole thing out altogether either. The writerly friends I found believe in my memoir when I am so discouraged I have given up believing in it myself. I've done the same for them. We keep each other going the same way that the Inklings did.

