

*This profile originally appeared on the Amherst Writers & Artists (AWA) website*

### **Marian Calabro: Workshops for Adults Who Have Always Wanted to Write**

“Since I started leading workshops in 2005, it has been endlessly satisfying to help hundreds of adults discover the writer within themselves,” says AWA Affiliate Marian Calabro. Marian’s workshops take place in her native New Jersey, mainly at the Adult School of Montclair and in private groups. While there is no typical participant, many “night writers” (as Marian affectionately calls them) juggle day jobs, family commitments, and the burning desire to write creatively. It’s a balancing act that Marian knows well, since she lives it herself.

Marian somehow landed on AWA’s newsletter mailing list in the early 1990s. “Somehow I knew this group would be important to me,” she recalls, “but even though I read and reread Pat Schneider’s first book, I didn’t travel to Amherst until 2001.” After several weekend workshops at Pat’s home, Marian became a leader in April 2004. She was part of the same training group as several individuals who have kept the AWA flame burning brightly. “It changed my life,” she says.

As a long-time publishing professional and nonfiction book writer, Marian had been in several writers’ groups with different styles over the years. “The Amherst method is the first one that made total sense to me, especially the practice of treating everything as fiction,” she emphasizes. “That is still a key inspiration, especially because I see firsthand how it helps writers reach into their own deep material.”

AWA’s encouragement of multiple genres and forms is another inspiration. “Pre-AWA I sometimes felt like a magpie or dilettante because I enjoy everything from nonfiction and playwriting to poetry and song lyrics,” she says. “It’s very liberating to have a method that embraces the diverse. Also, writing fiction felt very artificial to me for decades—a feeling often shared by my workshop writers who are journalists or lawyers or academics. The AWA method got me past the fear of fiction, and in turn I try to help others make that journey.”

One of Marian’s groups meets at the home of a college professor and her partner. “They’re social scientists, not literature teachers, so I’m amazed whenever they say, ‘I love this exercise—I’m going to use it with my students.’ They tell me that the non-academic, non-competitive approach is why the prompts work so well. The Amherst method travels far beyond what anyone can measure.”

Marian’s primary workshop, called “First Draft Fever,” is going strong. Because the Adult School likes to market things differently sometimes, she has developed variations: “Breaking Writer’s Block,” “From Anecdote to Story,” and “Writing in Real Time.” But all of them follow the AWA method. She also draws on her background for single, non-writing sessions such as “Publishing 101 for Creative Writers” and “Structuring Your Memoir or Organizational History.”

For more information about Marian Calabro and her work, please visit her website, <http://www.mariancalabro.com/>