

TRAINING AT THE FARM In New Hampshire

A collaborative effort from creators, writers and guests of Whitebridge Farm Productions.

Ernest Thompson, Oscar winning writer of *ON GOLDEN POND*, recently offered his talent and his home, Whitebridge Farm in New Hampshire, to train playwrights and screenwriters. In his workshop on July 17-19, "Write On Golden Pond," Thompson welcomed and encouraged a group of writers representing Washington, California, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire to "give birth to scripts in his barn."

"I was a playwrighting major at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and I earned my MA from Dartmouth, so I've been in a few writing workshops. The weekend workshop with Ernest Thompson was easily among the best, a truly unique experience."

What we ended up doing astounded me. It was magical. The magic was the quality of the work. Every person created something dramatic and powerful – you could feel the energy in the audience as they watched the readings.

The magic came from the setting, the structure of the workshop, and Ernest's way of working with the writers. Whitebridge Farm is an idyllic location, comparable to some of the great artists' retreats in this country, but more intimate in being, well, Ernest's house."

– Matt, Writer

The writers arrive Friday night for a cocktail party where they meet one another as well as the actors who will return Sunday to rehearse and read the scripts that will be created in less than 48 hours. The actors go home and the writers sit down at Thompson's dining room table and begin the process of planting the seeds that will create their vision – and an outline they will return with Saturday morning.

"Participating in the inaugural weekend of "Write On Golden Pond" was one of the most exciting experiences of my life. Ernest Thompson's instruction was insightful and inspiring. Having the workshop take place at his home was icing on the cake! The workshop was an investment in my creative future."

– Lisa, Professor

Thompson serves as a gracious facilitator to the creative process and his home, of course, serves as the perfect setting for a writer. Each writer is able to find his own space, choosing rooms for themselves in Thompson's cozy New England style farmhouse, or a spot in the barn, or even outside onto his sprawling lawn, at a table, on a lawn chair, or on the sandy beach by the pond. Thompson offers one-on-one feedback throughout the afternoon, finding writers with their laptops in hand, working with each of them on the development of their first draft.

"Ernest's generosity and sincere concern for his students' learning was matched only by his wealth of talent and experience. Each one of

us started Friday evening with a blank sheet of paper and ended Sunday evening seeing our short play read by excellent, professional actors before a live audience. To say this was a life changing experience would be an understatement."

– Jeffrey, MD

Writers return to the dining room table with their drafts that evening and Thompson offers suggestions. The day concludes and the writers go home and work on their second draft. Sunday morning is spent sitting around the table once again, this time the writers are reading each other's words aloud and getting feedback from the master facilitator and one another. By Sunday afternoon their third and final draft is ready which is rehearsed and then read by professional actors for an invited audience in Thompson's theatre-styled barn.

"The best part of the workshop was being able to see my play performed by professional actors, and watching the audience react to certain lines. It was so gratifying to realize I had drawn out emotions from people through my writing."

– Barbra, Editor

"I can't teach talent, but I can encourage it," Thompson says. He always remains positive as he goes on to add, "Anything is possible, and I am living proof. Cream rises. That script or story will eventually find its way."

Thompson has a long history of building community relationships and participating in local programs in the Lakes Region which he is proud to call his home. "I have spent four decades in the entertainment business and I like sharing what I have learned," says Thompson. He has worked with legendary actors such as Henry Fonda, Katharine Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine, Julie Andrews, Christopher Plummer, Jack Lemmon, Robert Downey, Jr., Keifer Sutherland and Liza Minnelli, to name only a few Hollywood legends.

Ernest fills the weekend with anecdotes of his past work with Hollywood icons, but somehow he makes the writer feel like the real star. The weekend produced a collection of raw and exciting work. "Write On Golden Pond" was more than a writing workshop. It was an experience that I will apply to my writing life for years to come.

– John, Filmmaker

A New Hampshire native, Thompson created Whitebridge Farm Productions, with partners Morgan Murphy and Lori Gigliotti Murphy, to produce socially conscious independent films and theatre projects, offer performing arts related educational programs and workshops and embrace theatre arts and filmmaking in the New Hampshire community while speaking to a world wide audience. Whitebridge Studios offers opportunities for writers, actors, directors, technical staff, designers, and crew for stage and screen to get involved at the professional, student, intern, and volunteer levels. One-day, weekend, and weekly programs are available year-round at Thompson's Whitebridge Farm in the Lakes Region of New Hampshire and other locations state-wide.

Upcoming workshops offered by Whitebridge Studios include "Write On Golden Pond" on August 21st – August 23rd; "Act



On Golden Pond," a one-day master class in acting for the stage and screen taught by Thompson; Acting for the Camera beginning September 12th, a six-week workshop series which helps actors at all levels bring the best of themselves to the big-screen, instructed by professionals in studios around New Hampshire; On Location Training, a production calendar based day program; and The Screen Test, a program for advanced screen actors instructed by Thompson.

Visit the website at www.WhitebridgeFarmProductions.com for more information.

clockwise from top left
Writers start the day stretching with Thompson outside the barn. Photo by Morgan Murphy.

Workshop participant Barbra Alan enjoys the outdoors as she sits at a table on the back deck of Thompson's home working on her draft. Photo by Morgan Murphy.

Thompson introduces a reading of a new work to an invited audience in his theatre-styled barn. Photo by Morgan Murphy.

Invited guests enjoy a moment during intermission on the dock at Whitebridge Farm's pond. Photo by Morgan Murphy.

Jeff Tolstad works in Thompson's library as OSCAR quietly watches over him. Photo by Morgan Murphy.

After meeting one another and the actors that will perform their pieces, writers sit at the dining room table at Whitebridge Farm and discuss what their projects might be. Photo by P.T. Sullivan.

Writers brainstorm around Thompson's dining room table. Photo by P.T. Sullivan.

Whitebridge founders and weekend workshop writers gather by the pond after the presentation of plays. Photo by Morgan Murphy.