

UNH Professor Authors Book for Readers and Writers

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UNH News Bureau

April 17, 2001

Editors and news directors: Margaret Love Denman is available for interviews at (603) 862-0261.

DURHAM, N.H. -- Margaret Love Denman, director of the University of New Hampshire's creative writing program, has co-authored a guide for aspiring novelists that uses the experiences of popular contemporary authors to illustrate the daily challenges of the creative process.

"Novel Ideas: Contemporary Authors Share the Creative Process" features chapters on the general principles of writing fiction, as well as lengthy interviews with 23 novelists, including Alice McDermott, a UNH graduate and National Book Award winner; Jane Smiley, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of "A Thousand Acres"; Wally Lamb; Jill McCorkle; Ha Jin; and former UNH professors John Yount and Theodore Weesner.

"About four years ago a gentleman from a textbook company tried to sell me something and I realized there are two types of books about writing, the cheerleader type and those that offer a more philosophical response," says Denman. "The novel is really a middle-class genre, it's not a classical form. It's a way of life. There is no formula, no textbook in the traditional sense of how-to. So, we decided to ask authors how they do it, or 'where do you find your stuff?' This book is their answers."

Denman, who co-wrote the book with author Barbara Shoup, says the decision on who to interview wasn't scientific.

"We decided not to interview anyone whose work we didn't like," she says. "We both would have to be

enthusiastic about the writer's work, and the writer had to have written more than one book. Then, we just got on the phone. Every single person we interviewed had wonderful stories about where their novels had come from and tales of that moment of combustion, when it all came together. To me, that is such an exciting experience. No two books are ever the same."

Although "Novel Ideas" is intended to educate and inspire writers, Denman says it will also appeal to readers eager to learn more about their favorite authors and the inspiration behind familiar stories and characters.

"I believe everyone has one good story in them," she says. "If this book encourages just one person to sit down and write that story, than that will make me very happy. You can't have too many good books. The novel has that wonderful quality of allowing us to find the truth about our own hearts. The reading of fiction allows us to be more humane than we might be otherwise."

And Denman says that if the book increases the readership of any of the featured writers it will be a success.

"A literate population is the best defense we have against another Holocaust or hate crimes," she says. "I have real hopes that this will encourage people with a story in their heart or tucked in the bottom of a drawer. That story is worth writing, even if you're the only one who reads it."

Denman, an English professor at UNH since 1991, has one published novel, "A Scrambling After Circumstance," and two circulating with literary agents.

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