

JP Howard Testimonial

Maine Writers Studio Inaugural 2024 Writer-in-Residence

I hit the “writer’s lottery” when I was selected as the inaugural 2024 writer-in-residence for Maine Writers Studio Writers Retreat, founded and curated by author and fierce literary citizen, Nina B. Lichenstein. I applied for this free, annual one-week writing retreat, in what was described as a “gloriously renovated barn apartment located near the town-green in Brunswick, Maine.” I had not attended a writer’s retreat in many years and desperately desired an opportunity to focus on my writing in a retreat setting. As I explained in my application, the retreat would provide me with a much-needed respite from commitments of work, family and curating a monthly literary salon series back home in New York, to solely focus on my writing. I nervously submitted an excerpt of my manuscript-in-progress, a middle-grade novel-in-verse, titled *Poetic Justice for Pearl*, inspired by my own life, about a shy young black girl growing up in Harlem, who wants to grow-up to be both poet and lawyer and explore the intersection of poetry and justice. I was both shocked and delighted when Nina sent me an email that I had been selected as the Maine Writers Studio inaugural writer in residence! The invite included an opportunity to be a writer-in-residence for one week, as well as present excerpts of my manuscript-in-progress to writers at the Brunswick Literary Salon & Open Mic, where I would be in conversation and community with local Maine writers.

I was able to live my best writer’s life for one week in the gorgeous town of Brunswick. From the moment I stepped foot in the “gloriously refurbished barn apartment” I felt at home. It is a stunning and welcoming two-story space, spacious and modern with lots of natural light and plenty of space to write inside or outside in the beautiful garden. The most challenging adjustment for me was adapting to the quiet and pitch-black night in the evenings. Back home in New York, honking cars and bright city lights lulled me to sleep and this quiet calm was the exact opposite. There were many highlights of my stay; some favorites included writing in the lush garden beyond the doorsteps. I enjoyed exploring the town of Brunswick and by the end of the week, I was a familiar face on Maine Street, stopping often to sit and write in Reverie Coffee House, an adorable local café, with delicious coffee, where both staff and patrons were friendly. I often walked miles, visiting artsy stores and delicious restaurants on Maine Street, walking along the town green, shopping at the local farmer’s market and I often walked around the beautiful sprawling campus of Bowdoin College, all within walking distance of the residency. Some nights I had the great fortune to sit in the huge gazebo that looks out on the Brunswick Town Mall all to myself, where I would write to my heart’s content; that felt magical! Nina and her husband Tony were gracious hosts; when I arrived at the beautiful space that would be my home-away-from home for a week, in the refrigerator were delicious treats to welcome me, including fresh fruit; they left me the best local Maine coffees, which I brewed each morning and sipped while sitting in the garden. The residency is just a few minutes’ walk from Hannaford Supermarket, a spacious store that stocked everything my writer’s heart desired. While there, Nina took me on a mini-hike and scenic drive by the ocean, where I was mesmerized with the extraordinary beauty of Maine nature.

I had an amazing time participating in the Brunswick Literary Salon & Open Mic, where I shared new work, including an excerpt of my novel-in-progress. Nina and attendees asked thoughtful, thought-provoking questions and my work was well received. The multi-genre open mic was phenomenal and OneSixtyFive: The Inn on Park Row, the venue where the Salon was hosted, was spectacular and one of many highlights. Ultimately, it was an extraordinary week of writing, editing, sharing my writing, meeting dynamic local Maine writers, and exploring nature. I left Maine Writers Studio feeling energized, affirmed, encouraged and excited to finish my writing project!