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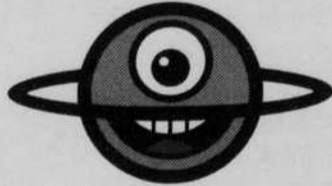
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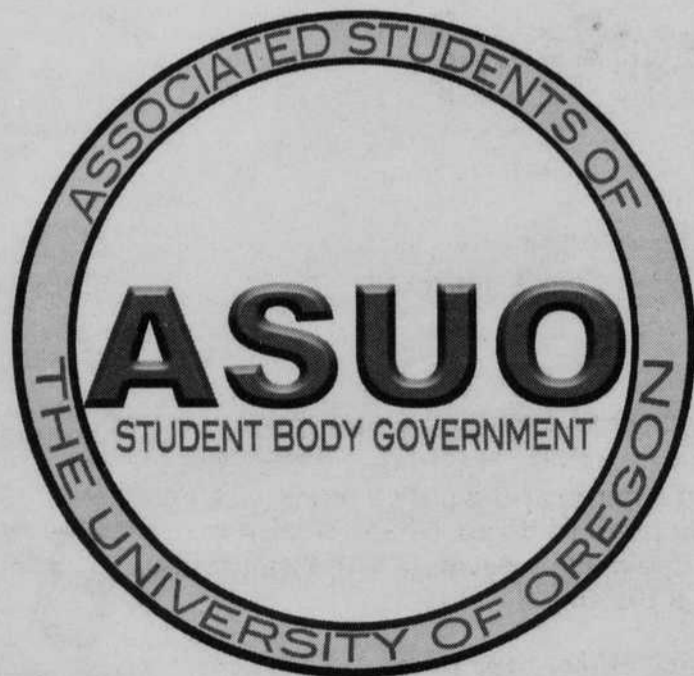
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A horror writer's haven

Workshop helps writers hone their terror skills amid a haunted scene

BY TREVOR DAVIS
PULSE REPORTER

Sitting at a corner table in the kitchen on a Friday night, Bill Smee makes himself comfortable.

Outside he sees a cool fog over Siltcoos Lake with the moon reflecting on the water.

He hears a train rattle down the tracks in the distance.

While he sips coffee and types on his laptop, he understands that he'll likely be up all night.

For a good reason: He's writing a ghost story.

Smee is one of about 20 writers who attend a writing workshop at Siltcoos Lake near Florence taught annually by Eugene writer Elizabeth Engstrom through Lane Community College.

The objective is to write a fictional story with a ghostly element by the end of the weekend.

"The whole idea is to have fun," Smee said in reference to the workshop held on the Oregon Coast every May.

After 10 years of the workshop, "Dead on Demand: The Best of Ghost Story Weekend" was published in 2001 by Triple Tree Publishing of Eugene. The book spent time on the Library Journal's best-seller list.

"I was surprised how well it was received," Engstrom said. "I thought it would mostly sell to people in the (workshop) group. That was good enough for me."

The second book is the recently released "Ghost at the Coast: The Best of Ghost Story Weekend, Volume 2," another anthology of short fictional ghost stories.

For most of the authors, Volume 1

was their first time being published. That included Smee, who worked at the University for 26 years with jobs in food service, custodial work and public safety.

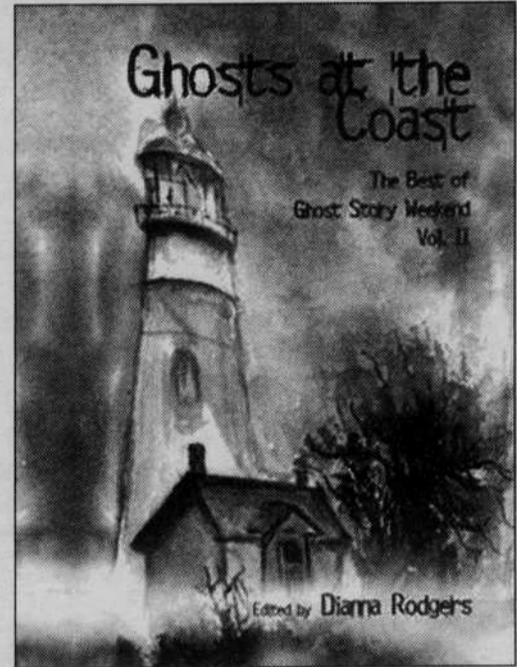
The workshop began in the early '90s when Engstrom, who has nine books published, was teaching a fiction writing class at Heceta Head Lighthouse north of Florence.

"Everyone was talking about how the lighthouse was haunted. 'Well', I thought, 'this would be a great place to write ghost stories.'"

Years later the workshop was moved to Siltcoos Station and Research Center, an off-campus facility owned by LCC. The former train station and motel consists of four cabins and a boathouse that was once a dance hall.

"It's very cool. Its got a lot of history," Engstrom said.

The rural lake setting adds to the ghost writing mood. Smee describes the area as wooded with few people around. "A couple times a day, or at night, the train goes by," Engstrom said.



COURTESY

"It can be quite conducive to writing ghost stories," Smee added.

While the focus is on fun, Engstrom makes sure the class receives plenty of instructional aid. Before the group arrives, she organizes a pre-trip meeting

where she teaches the structure of short stories. Once the class arrives, participants discuss the elements of a short story and talk about what scares them.

"I've thought about it, and it's not so much the scaring part ... it's the sense of awe that one might sometimes get when faced with the unknown," Smee said.

While writing, participants are given freedom in the creative process. Writers choose the topic, voice and where they write. "It's entirely up to the author," Smee said.

"People write everywhere. A lot of

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