

# A space for you . . .

Early morning at Camp Michigania and the sun is skimming the chill off the surface of Walloon Lake. The Bear River Writers' Conference begins its day. Participants leave their cozy lodges and wander along the paths to the dining hall to chat and fill themselves with a good breakfast. The hall is loud with conversation as attendees and faculty renew acquaintances and find new friendships. Outside the windows, the landscape brightens to full day and writers pause in their discussions to consider the spectacular views that surround them.

This is the singular experience of Bear River — the fabric of the conference woven from twin loves, for the worlds of words and nature. Bear River is a place of diverse community that welcomes all of the individual voices of its many participants.

. . . outside . . .

Workshop slips into motion around 9am, the breakfast crowd dispersed into small groups of twelve. With their coffee cups and notebooks, writers gather around tables and in front of fireplaces and begin the work of the day. Conversation quickly condenses into an intense discussion of writing, process and products. Poets squint at their journals, deciphering lines from the previous night's inspiration. Fiction writers contemplate their newly minted pages and invite suggestions from the group. The atmosphere is alternately relaxed and avid, laughter a familiar punctuation to these hours.

After an intense morning of creative dialogue, participants shuffle back to the dining halls for lunch, and more conversation about the morning's achievements and their various passions for writing. The conference is deeply embedded in the natural world and the striking landscape of northern Michigan is not simply backdrop for the session, but inspiration for the creative work of participants and faculty.

Afternoon arrives and the rhythm of the conference changes. The options for recreation multiply as, each day, faculty and special guests offer readings and craft talks in the camp's education center. Participants have the opportunity to engage in active interchange with published authors, to find answers to the questions inspired by these writers' works. Those seeking a brief break from the demands of their pens may decide to use this time to wander the nature trails of the camp, go flyfishing or take a canoe and explore the calm of Walloon Lake.

Some participants elect to spend the afternoon reading or writing. Others investigate the nearby attractions in Petoskey, Boyne City, Harbor Springs, Bay Harbor and East Jordan. As the sun edges down toward the horizon, participants return again to the comfortable space of the dining hall to relax with one another over a satisfying meal and relive the day's highlights.

. . . of the everyday

Evening at Bear River and participants once again disperse, to read, to write, to listen to the creative work of their teachers. Faculty readings carry the conference to twilight. Later, some participants bring stories and instruments and gather around the campfire, yet burning down along the lakeside. Some, under the thrall of the day's creative energy, find a quiet spot in front of one of the camp's many fireplaces and work filling the blank pages of their notebooks. On Saturday, many participants venture away from the campgrounds to enjoy an evening of words and music at Crooked Tree Arts Center. The conference's creative endeavors culminate on the final night in a special reading that showcases the work of participants, with some students performing their work to music, often for the first time.

The Bear River Writers' Conference, which runs from dinner on Thursday through breakfast on Monday, is defined by its own particular geography, situated as it is at the intersection of the natural and creative worlds. Populated by an eclectic collection of writers of all levels of experience, it offers community members a hiatus from daily routine and the chance to find a space for themselves and their words.

# Find your place at Bear River