

Paul Reisler

Quotes from Songwriting Students:

“I have been coming to songwriting camps for some time to gain knowledge, but when I attended Paul Reisler’s classes on ‘Harmony and Chord Substitution’ I received something better than mere knowledge, I received understanding—where all that accumulated knowledge came together into a useable form. Then I attended his class ‘A Song is a Story is a Song’ and was given something even more significant, and that is wisdom.”
Cliff Rice, Valparaiso, IN

“I wanted to take a minute and tell you what an impact you had not only on my writing, but my life. Your song to Julie, on Sunday, moved me instantly to tears....the blue dress and 2022...Paul? THAT was one of the most beautiful, touching songs I've ever heard....maybe it was the presentation...maybe it was everything about it. Once again, I'd like to thank you for your professionalism, your dedication and the sharing of your knowledge with all of us.”
John Becker

“I wanted to let you know that the workshop on Directed Writing I took with you at the Song School in Lyons, CO this summer was one of the most practical and best ever. I loved how the interview process with my partner allowed me to synthesize all the stories into a song so quickly and creatively. My husband's step mom, who I loved a lot, recently passed away. I thought it would be great to write a song for her memorial service. I interviewed my father in law over the phone, with a few follow up conversations, to learn about the transformational moment when his life changed when he met her. She was a hard core sailor and lived on her boat for 40 years (15 with my father in law). He was a marine diesel mechanic and was the only one in CA who knew how to work on her boat's engine and it turned out he worked out of the same harbor her boat was in. I ended up writing the song from the place of checking in with the boat to see how she was doing since her "girl" had passed away. I was able to then tell the story about meeting her husband and the love they shared over the short time they were together and the love they share with the boat. It was a great experience not only to write the song but to get to have such a great way to become closer with my father in law.” Rebecca Eaton, Park City, UT

“In the weeks since Song School I have been talking, thinking, and above all, writing -- yes, everyday, every morning-- about what it was that made this experience so extraordinary for so many. I have heard quoted phrases like "the best 5 days of my life," and "Song School changed my life.

Granted, not everyone may have been moved in this way, but amazingly, miraculously, many of us obviously were. A love for music and storytelling is something in which we were all clearly bonded. Honoring the creative moment as an act of love, whether in the case of creating something new, or in active listening, was a major chord in which we all could resonate. However I am utterly convinced that the joy which sang forth from that

place and time had to do with much more than good lyrics and a decent melody. What that something was, that could bring so much joy to so many, I am still trying to understand. I may spend the rest of my life in trying to better understand and explain this. It is my hope that I may continue to propagate, reflect and refract, in some small way, that light which shined, and shines still. It dances on high, in the music which we play, the stories that we tell, and in the simple joy we gratefully share. Every step, A dance” ~ Lawrence Meredith

“Whether you’ve bagged a hundred songs or just a half of one falling through a hole in your pocket, this guy can help. Whatever stage of songwriting you’re at, Paul has a wonderful knack for meeting you where you are. For all the melody, music theory, poetry, and storytelling that goes into good songwriting – he’s a fantastic guide. We covered a ton of stuff in a few days, and I’m ready to go back for more!”

Dr. Peter Bingham, VT

“The week I spent with you in the Blue Ridge changed my life. You taught me songwriting, you taught me courage, and ultimately you taught me about the part of performance that is truly a selfless act of giving and sharing. I’ll always be grateful for your collective generosity of spirit and love.” Amy Sullivan, VA

“I wanted to send a quick thank you. I won't be at Song School for the first time in five years this August, and it's made me a bit reflective. We haven't talked all that much over the years but your class was one of the first I took at Song School. Hearing you talk about how you took on the challenge of writing a song a day for a week (and continued on with the exercise) inspired me to give it a go myself. First, when I arrived at Song School the first year and next when I hit a dry spell for a couple years and wanted to have new material to arrive back with my fourth year back. "Song a Day" weeks have become a regular part of my writing. (I'm guessing I've done about seven over the past two years along with 28 days worth of songs last February). They seem to free up the whole process for me, they have certainly made me more prolific, and almost always seem to yield "miracle songs" that show almost completely formed and that I had never imagined existing before. You've been a great inspiration to me on that front. Also, the openness and grace that you and Julie shared with us over the past two years have been beautiful. Thank you.” Tim Riordan

“I’m 58 and started writing songs a year and a half ago. I have been to two song schools. I took your directed writing class last year. It was exactly what I needed and even though I butchered the performance of my song, that really got me to go out and play at other places to try to learn how to do better. I write by ear because I have no other choice and if my ear doesn't match the chords I know, I'm stuck. So your harmony and chord substitution class has opened up a whole new world. I'm not there yet of course but just knowing how to tie chord changes to melody is wonderful. I'm already looking forward to next year. I also appreciate your sincere interest in us and teaching even though I'm sure it was a difficult time for you. Your heart comes through as clearly as your knowledge. Thank you”

“As an artist, this workshop has been the most illuminating and uplifting experience of my life.”
Jim Dugan, Alexandria, VA

“I want to tell you how much your guidance and support helps me, keeps my wheels turning. Your words, comments, spirit are fine companions as I walk along and listen for the stories and songs that come from my heart. Thank you for listening, and for reminding me to listen. You have a gift not only for your own art and craft, but also for creating an atmosphere that is safe, nurturing, yet challenging. The song circles were unforgettable.”
Michael Cervone, NY

“My favorite thing about the workshop: Paul Reisler's through knowledge of his material and professional and sure-handed way he delivered it. In fact it goes beyond that: His delivery transcended being polished. He entertained, he thought provoked, he engaged, he had me at every turn. I just never got bored. He transfixed. He is a gifted person: as a teacher, a guitarist, a songwriter, an inspirer.” Bud Tower, New Orleans, LA

“I don't know where to begin to thank you for the amazing experience I had at Songcamp. It was a combination of both your energies, guidance, wisdom, talent, and love that created the community feeling and togetherness we all were blessed to experience. What I learned has stayed with me and is really changing my writing in an exciting and deep way.” Atoosa Salimi, NY, NY

“Songs and lyrics just keep coming out of me! I've already written 2 between leaving the camp and spending my last week in the states! Its thanks to you that I have finally found a way to just write all this stuff!” Jodie O'Callaghan, Reading, U.K.

“Thanks for your generous ways as a teacher, for bringing me songs I can believe in, songs that breathe new life into my sense of hope.”
Alisa Fineman,
Aromas, CA

“There were so many seeds that were planted that I am continually nurturing. Some have borne fruit and others are still growing below the surface readying to burst through at any moment.”
Bryce Taylor, IN

“You have a way about you that encourages tapping into the senses on a deeper level, to draw from the inner pools of ones imagination. The object writing, visualization, and co-writing segments were very freeing for me. I wrote about a childhood memory of fighting for my life swimming in the ocean. It was such a sensory experience for me, truly being swept away, and one I never told my parents about that day, or ever! Your teaching challenged me to go within, in a safe environment, and retreat into the world of my imagination diving for pearls. It was very cool! It takes a big heart to teach the way you do, Paul, and everybody felt your heart, full of compassion. One more thing...although I'm a keyboard player, I noticed that those who came to your guitar workshop were totally blown away. They were buzzing w/ energy! It made me think about picking up the guitar again and learning new approaches w/ open tuning, and starting to write w/ guitar. In closing, thank-you for your brave inspiration. I look forward to working with you again. Einstein said, ‘IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE’, and your approach confirms it.”

Jackie Fishell, Nashville, TN

“The best musical experience I’ve ever had.”

Eric Eckl, President Songwriters Association of Washington, DC

“To say the least, I had a fantastic experience at song camp. The intimate atmosphere, the quality of the instructors and the attendees, the beautiful environment and the connections I made elevated me to a new level on my musical journey. Most of all I want to thank you and Julie for the whole experience.” H. Hanson

“I want to thank you so much for the songcamp experience. There are many ways in which it changed/deepened things for me, but I'll just say that it deepened my capacities for understanding what music can be, and be about. As a writer, I was interested in the prosody aspect, which I have focused on increasingly in my understanding of poetry, esp. bard-like epics, poems, etc. by such as Seamus Heaney, Jorie Graham, and others. Also the capacity for language/associations to move in radical/magical ways. All in all, the connection between music /songwriting and other art forms that I am interested/involved in was especially meaningful for me. It's amazing how it all comes around together -- after all!” Denise Horton, Charlottesville, VA

“In an instant, you reshaped my attitude toward art, toward less studious people, and toward my place in respect to the music industry. Occasionally someone comes along who reveals between his words and actions that he has far surpassed my level in such things... and it is both refreshing and challenging to witness. For the first time ever, someone... you... introduced me to the possibility that art equates to, or parallels, the spiritual... Somehow, despite having read of such an association in some cultures, through many hundreds of years of history, I never "felt" the relationship as you allowed me to feel it. You teach far more than just the subject matter at hand. I love learning, and feel a strong affinity for what you are capable of teaching, at many levels.”

G.L. NSAI Songcamp student

“This was a life changing experience for me. Paul is brilliant and accomplished but he has such an appreciation for the artist’s experience that anyone at any level can learn from him.” Audrey Hallet, Washington, DC

“Thank you again for the transformative experiences at Song School- it changed my life. Working with you opened a door that I didn't even know was there, and I can't wait to find out what's inside.” Katie Sawert, Flagstaff, AZ

During your workshops my creativity really started to flow in so many directions--I was getting new ideas for books, stories AND songs during those hours! The exercises you asked us to do set off sparks in so many different places. Nyree, CA

Once again, I have to thank you for the many opportunities you have provided to me and so many other aspiring songwriters over the years through your songcamps. I realize

how fortunate I am to have had these learning experiences and have also had a lot of fun too!
Jean Bayou, Annandale, VA

“Paul is one of that small number of teachers who will do whatever it takes to reach people in the areas where they need to be reached. He approaches this in the same way he composes music—in a very original style, changing the time signature when he needs to and using all kinds of different approaches.” Steve Szymanski, Director, Rocky Mountain Folks Song School, Lyons, CO

“If you want to grow as a songwriter, attend this workshop! In its breadth, depth and heart lay knowledge, insight and transformation. The teaching is top-notch and the classes are well balanced. Expect great information and spiritual/emotional insight into songwriting and performance.” Paul Berkobin, PA

“Greetings from Nashville, where I'm about to begin (tomorrow) NSAI song camp 102. Needless to say, with 86 campers and an emphasis on "commercial" writing, the NSAI camp will have a completely different vibe than the wonderful camp that we finished 10 days ago in Little Washington. I'm certainly not opposed to "commercial" writing (indeed, I aspire to it!), but I doubt very seriously that I'll hear anything approaching the depth or emotion of the songs that Anna or Becca wrote while at camp. And I also doubt that I'll leave the camp with anything approaching the creative charge I've received over the last ten days since the final song circle ended at 3:00 a.m. on Wednesday night/Thursday morning.

To me, the sisters provide a pretty good case study of your impact. I briefly met Cathy last year at an NSAI song camp, and I assumed that, like me, she hoped to make it as a commercial writer in Nashville. During the first few days of your song camp, I was a little worried that, for two seemingly simple mid-westerners who are used to putting on a "Branson-style" stage show, some of the classes and exercises might be a little too "touchy-feely" -- a little too "out there," if you know what I mean. I worried that, rather than tossing imaginary balls, Cathy and Kristy might be secretly longing for a little more nuts-and-bolts instruction on writing catchy choruses and killer hooks. But after seeing them during the final afternoon of the camp (when they sang their just-composed songs and heard the song that Anna had written based on Kristy's story) and talking with them later on that evening (when both of them were constantly brushing away tears), it became evident to me that the camp was probably a life-changing experience for both of them; that, with your help, they were able to gain access to a part of themselves that they never even knew existed. You've helped me do the same thing -- to reconnect with that part of myself where my best writing comes from; to worry less about commercial appeal and to write -- and perform -- from the heart.” Will Hopkins, Nashville, TN

“This is a great workshop for any songwriter who's ready to take his or her writing to the next level. Paul is great at helping you learn to tap into your own experience and emotion -- to write from the heart; to write songs that no one else but you could write,

and to write songs that really connect with your audience. It's a refreshing change from other workshops that focus more on "formula" songwriting. Paul share lots of great tips for overcoming "writers block" -- take his "directed writing" class, and you'll never find yourself staring at a blank sheet of paper again!

Julie is truly amazing performance coach – you'll learn how to perform "from the inside-out." By the end of her classes, you understand that performing is not about "acting" or putting on a mask. It's about letting the real you shine through. That's how you really connect with an audience. It was amazing to see the "before-and-after" transformations that occurred with just about everyone in the class. " Will Hopkins, Nashville, TN

"First of all it was really good to see you and I just have to tell you that your instruction in song camp was awesome. I really learned a lot and was particularly impressed by the personal attention you gave song campers. In all the years I've been going to these things I learned more from you and Jai Joseph than anyone else. Of course I've known you for a long time but many of my colleagues remarked about how down to earth you were. I left there convinced you are a genius. I hope you write a book soon so I'll have all that good info for reference because it was hard to get it all. " Charlie Jordan, Elkins, WV

"I feel like I'm still just in that amazing zone from this past week. I cannot thank you and Julie enough for being committed to all of us, nurturing our creativity and providing tools to reach even deeper. I was just blown away that each and every single person in the intensive came out with songs that reached beyond where they started. What a rich experience." Amy Speace, NY, NY

"I just wanted to thank you for making it possible for me to come to song camp. Lisa has raved about you for years so it was great to finally meet you! I appreciate being welcomed into the community despite my youth! I have already re-written the Mirror song with a much-improved bridge. And Thursday I will be recording Lady Liberty ... both an acoustic and full rock version with many glorious harmonies.

I do not come from a musical family. When I started 2nd grade my teacher took notice that I was writing songs for all my school projects. And even though I was a shy child I was always exuberant to share my songs with the class. She convinced my mom to let me take piano lessons. I found my way to Lisa when I was 8. And she has been nurturing my passion ever since.

Before I started writing/performing my songs, I was a hyperactive and insecure student. Music brought everything into focus and turned my world around. And I have thanked both my 2nd grade teacher and Lisa with my song Quiet Hero (you can hear it on my Myspace). So if there's anything I can ever do for Kin Pan Alley, please be sure to let me know. No one knows better than me how songwriting can empower a child." Margot MacDonald, Arlington, VA

"I don't know if you remember this, but I called you in 2004, on the recommendation of Steve Symanski, to ask what Song School was like. I had been attending the Folks Festival the last few years, and participating in the song circles, always playing cover songs but being amazed at all the people who had written their own songs. Somebody, I

think it was Frank Martin, said "you should go to Song School next year". I remember thinking, or even saying, "thanks but that probably won't do me any good, I can't write songs". I had a prejudice that songwriters were born, not made; and that I didn't have it in me to write songs. The same thing happened at a song circle at the next Folks Festival, and I began thinking seriously about going the next year. I thought to myself, "what's the worst that could happen? I still won't be able to write songs, but I can hang out with the songwriters all week and play lead guitar for them. Not a bad way to spend a week." Still, I was afraid; I thought I'd be embarrassed to be the only person at the whole song school who couldn't write a song. So I emailed Planet Bluegrass to ask what Song School was like, would I be "forced" to write a song, etc. Steve replied and sent your name and phone# and told me to call you. So I did. I asked if I'd be "pressured" to write a song, and wanted to find out if it would be the situation that I feared--that I'd be the retarded kid in class; "OK Rob, now let's hear your song". "Uh, I wasn't able to write a song. I'm a loser." But you reassured me somewhat, and I got up the courage to sign up and attend. I took your directed writing class, and, although it was hard, and I finished the song barely in time to play it Thursday, I *did* write a song, and it was pretty good. That gave me the confidence--by learning some skills--that I could do it. I remember walking into town, I think it was Wednesday around 6pm, and the 1st verse came to me. Tears poured down my face because it was *good*, and I wrote it. *I* wrote that. It's hard to describe what that did for my self-image. Something I had wanted to do all my life, but didn't think I was cut out for, I finally did. Songwriting is still difficult for me, but I've written many songs since then, so I know I can do it if I put the time in and keep a playful, creative attitude. I've been a much happier person ever since. I owe a lot of that to you. Thanks!"

Rob Roper
Denver, Colorado