

OXFORD



“YOU CAN’T HAVE AN AFFAIR in this town. [Laughing] Someone you know would see you. That’s one of the first pieces of advice I got here. And it’s true.” - KATE

“I LIKE THE SIZE, I like that it’s small. I really like being able to bike or walk everywhere here. But the community, that’s my favorite thing. The writing community, the MFA program, is nice, and people are out, but I also just like the general community. Like, I like that when I go to Bottletree [a bakery], they know what I get. And I like that I know the bartenders at the bars that I go to. It just feels comfortable, and really safe, but people here are pretty interesting. Things are billed to you as, like, ‘Oh, community!’ and you’re like, ‘Maybe it’ll be good?’ but it is, it actually is, so that’s been a pleasant truth.”

- VIRGINIA

“I LOVED THE SOCIAL LIFE of Oxford as a town, and the English department and the MFA department were parts of that, but, like I was saying earlier, a small town is just generally more welcoming to new people, at least this town is. I loved having friends outside of the program and outside of the university. And I felt like that was available and pretty easy to find. I met all my friends at the bookstore. [Laughing] If you run into someone two or three times at the bookstore and they’re within ten years of your age, they’ll probably ask for your phone number. [Laughing] While, in a city, if you meet someone you like and you’re like, ‘We should have dinner sometime,’ you’ll probably never have dinner with

them, because everyone is so busy. But here you'll have dinner, like, that night, and that's true within the program and also outside it.”

- MCKAY

“**IF I LEAVE BEYOND MY DRIVEWAY**, I have to be prepared to see somebody. I'm not going to be shocked when I go to Bottletree and see like ten people I know. Because there is the expectation that I'm going to see people all the time, it makes it a very intimate program. Sometimes it feels claustrophobic, just cause it's so small, but, I mean, if I want to be alone, I can be in my house, you know. It's a really nice sense of community. I mean, sometimes I wish there were some different restaurants, more of a variety sometimes, but on the flip side, we're all really close, and you get to know everybody. It's really nice.”

- LIZZIE

“**WHEN I DECIDED TO COME** to Ole Miss, I was choosing between here and Brooklyn College. One of the reasons I chose Ole Miss was because there would be less distractions in a small town. So, yes, there's definitely less to do here than there is in a city, but I think that's an advantage for someone in an MFA program. . . . I also love that I can just go to City Grocery and know I'll see someone that I know. I don't have a hundred options of bars to go to, but I have one, and I'll definitely have a friend there. And that's enough. It might not be enough for my whole life, but it's enough for three years. The day I finished the first draft of my novel I went straight to City Grocery, and Ace Atkins was sitting at the bar reading Hemingway, and I thought, this is such a wonderful place to live and write.”

- MCKAY

“**WE'RE NOT ASKING PEOPLE** to live here for the rest of their lives. We're asking people to come here and do good work — to work hard — and to teach well. We didn't come here for these great music venues, or these great movie houses, or these great museums, or

these great obscure restaurants from Tahiti, or, you know, Bangkok. We came here to learn and to write and to teach. So if you're worried that we don't have an internationally acclaimed museum, and that's the reason that you're going to go to school, then study museum science. Because we've got everything else that you're going to want as a writer. We have the faculty, we've got the student body, and we've got the venues. We've got the bookstores, and the old folks that are still writing — that are outside of the school, that are just around town. And if you're really straight-up worried about that stuff, there's the Mega Bus that goes down to New Orleans, Jackson, whatever. And it's a buck, man, it's a buck. You can get up to Memphis, same story there. . . . I've really enjoyed living here because of the teachers, the student body, our peer group, and then the locals. As a writer, I've got everything and anything I need. And as an academic, I've got the same resources. Again, I'm here to produce good work, whether it's scholarly or creatively. That's what I'm here to do, that's what I'm going to do, and it's a good place to do it."

- ANDREW

"I THINK IT'S REALLY COOL to live in a town where the bookstore is the nucleus of the community, where the bookstore owner was the mayor, and, you know, there's always someone from the MFA program working there. [Laughing] I've loved Square Books. It rivals football in terms of importance to Oxford. [Laughing] And it literally is in the center of town, and I love how it's open late. It's just a wonderful place." - MCKAY

"I WORK AT ROWAN OAK [William Faulkner's home, now a historic site], and we get people from all over the world. It used to surprise me when people were like, 'I'm from Germany,' or 'I'm from Mongolia,' and 'We just happened to be in the US and decided to drive down to Mississippi for Faulkner's house. And then maybe we're going to hit Eudora Welty's if we can get down to Jackson.' And so for that reason I think the tradition here is great. And right now there's a performance artist [at Rowan Oak] who's retyping all of *The*

Sound and the Fury on Faulkner's typewriter, on a single sheet of paper. He's typing it over and over again on the same sheet of paper. So eventually it's just going to be a big black mess, if it survives. If he's using, like, fairly light paper, that old typewriter will punch right through it.”

- ANDREW

“**ONE OF THE BENEFITS** of that, the literary history and reputation [of Oxford], is that we have a lot of cultural events going on. We have readings going on all the time. I got to have lunch with Tobias Wolff! Denis Johnson! Didn't Daniel Woodrell come? Andre Dubus. Patricia Smith. There's constantly people coming through here. With Square Books, and the University itself. There are A-list authors here on a routine basis. And they're accessible, especially through the program. For me, that's one of the huge benefits of it. I mean, to be on a first-name basis. You get these opportunities for one-on-one interactions with them. Plus, of course, we've got the master class with Richard Ford. And, I mean, it's not just literature. We have the film festival. The arts festival. Just fun. You know, a lot of local talent.”

- KATE

“**IF YOU'RE INTO PAINTING**, you're into acting, you're into whatever else, you've got ulterior things that you do, this is a place where you can do them. You just have to ask. Just find the people. And people are happy enough to help. Our program here has a big enough name, our people have enough sway, that if you say you're from the program and you're looking to start a recouping business where you glaze pots, you'll be able to find someone. Like, I have every faith in that. Whether it's a cheap kiln, or whatever else that you're looking for, you'll be able to find it. People want to help. People need us to a large degree, too. We're a vital part of the creative fabric of this place, even if we are relatively transient. And some of us stay here. If I could, I'd stay here. I probably won't be able to; you know, in the university universe, you have to go somewhere else for your Ph.D.”

- ANDREW

“IT’S A SMALL TOWN, but it’s also a cheap town. You can drink cheaper here than anywhere I have ever been. Especially if you’re a regular. Things aren’t expensive, rent’s not that bad. Writers are coming and going, people from all over the place are coming and going. It’s one of the few places I’ve experienced where people *care* that you’re a writer, you know. It’s valued here. And there’s a solid music scene. It’s not the best, but it’s not the worst either. As far as small towns go, it’s a fairly happening one. Genius per capita here is really high. There’s an amazing amount of incredibly intelligent weirdos for such a small town.”

- JIMMY

