

Writing Your Page Turning Memoir



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What *IS* Memoir?



- Memoir or autobiography?
- Life stories, personal writing
 - An examination of the self
- Forms your memoir/life stories might take
 - A memoir in essays
 - Book
 - Family legacy/history
 - Blog
 - Other!

Turning your life into art

Why Write Memoir?



- *Why* tell personal stories?
- *What* do you hope to accomplish?
- *Who* is your story for, what audience?
 - Family? Commercial memoir? Select group?

Your goals and intended audience will likely dictate the best form for your personal writing

What Memoir Is *Not*



- Grudge writing
- Writing to “set the record straight”
- A journalistic reporting of events
- A substitute for therapy – though it can be therapeutic!
- An opportunity for you to be the hero
 - Readers expect honesty and candor in memoir
 - Just as in fiction, they want real characters, warts and all
 - Our weaknesses and mistakes make us relatable

Common Pitfalls & Concerns



- Offending friends and family
- Liability and confidentiality
- Disclaimers and caveats
- Honesty is always the best policy
- Writing & Publishing – two distinct animals

Everything that's happened to you is all yours. Just write it. You can worry about the legal issues and the next bad holiday dinner later. Tell the story that's in you to tell.

Anne Lamott

How to Begin?



- **Choose what to tell**
 - Likely not your whole life
 - It may focus on an incident, life experience or time period
 - How were you changed?
 - What did you learn about yourself?
 - What scenes will best “show” the journey (how you changed)
 - Focus on a clear beginning, middle and end.

You can start small!

“Truth” in Memoir



- Emotional truth
- Whose truth?
- Dialogue
- “Perhapsing”
- Compression, composite characters, changing names
- Memory is mutable – interrogate yourself
- Can you make things up?

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- Making the personal universal

One life, deeply examined, ripples out to touch all lives.

Anaïs Nin

I realized that writing memoir and fiction has the ability to offer readers a portal into the common heart. It gives them a way to take another's experiences and make it their own.

Sue Monk Kidd

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- **Conflict drives story, whether in fiction or memoir**
 - Go deep – moments of highest emotion
 - Shame, guilt, remorse, regret, fear
- **When emotions are high, write cool**
 - Don't tell the reader how to feel
 - Let the story take them there
 - The old saw – show don't tell
 - Vary the heat – give your reader a breather!
 - Leaven the drama with humor

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- Creating the persona of the first-person narrator
 - Treating yourself as a character
 - Your experiences as stories
- “Now” narrator and “then” narrator
 - Becoming a split personality
 - The “now” narrator has perspective/reflects
 - The “then” narrator lived it

What Makes a Page-Turning Memoir?



Using the fiction writer's toolkit:

- Dialogue
- Setting
- Characters
- Sensory details
- Exposition
- Reflection
- Metaphor/simile
- Plot/story arc (beginning, middle and end)

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- Memoir takes us on a journey
- Where are we going?
- Who is taking us there?
- Why do we care? What's at stake?

Memoir is the narrator in conflict with the self.

An examination of the self . . .

Resources for Memoirists



- National Association of Memoir Writers
- CA Writers Club – Sacramento Branch
- Classes, many online
- Workshops and conferences
- Craft books
- Critique groups
- Journals/markets for personal essays
- AWA writing groups
- Read in the genre!

Craft Books on Writing Memoir



- *The Art of Memoir*, Mary Karr
- *Why We Write About Ourselves*, Meredith Maran
- *Writing Alone and with others*, Pat Schneider
- *The Memoir Project*, Marion Roach Smith
- *Writing the Memoir*, Judith Barrington
- *To Show and To Tell*, Phillip Lopate

Memorable Memoirs



- *Liar's Club*, Mary Karr
- *The Glass Castle*, Jeanette Walls
- *A Boy's Life*, Tobias Wolff
- *Running with Scissors*, Augusten Burroughs
- *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion
- *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt
- *Wild*, Cheryl Strayed
- *Hunger*, Roxane Gay

Your favorites?

Write That Memoir!



Thank You!

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Drop me an email to request a copy of the power point
or with any questions/comments