

Your Life as a Story

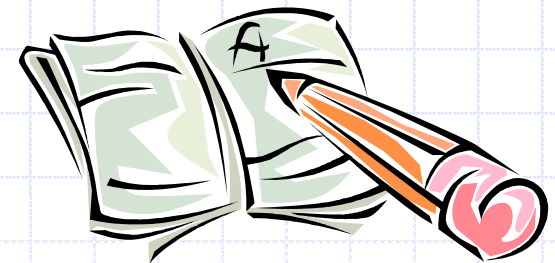
Memoir Writing 101



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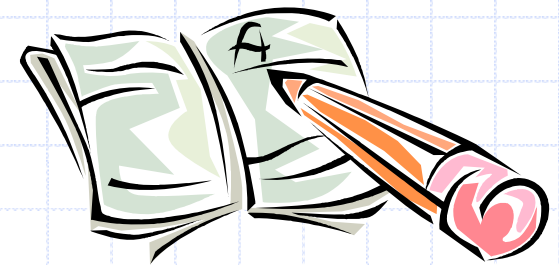
Principles of Memoir Writing

- ◆ Memoir writing is the nonfiction form closest to novel writing
 - Memoirs must have a beginning, middle, and end.
 - They must tell a compelling story about a life-changing time if they are to be commercially successful.
 - Because their benefit is somewhat intangible, the experience or the writing must be earthshattering.



Start with the Action

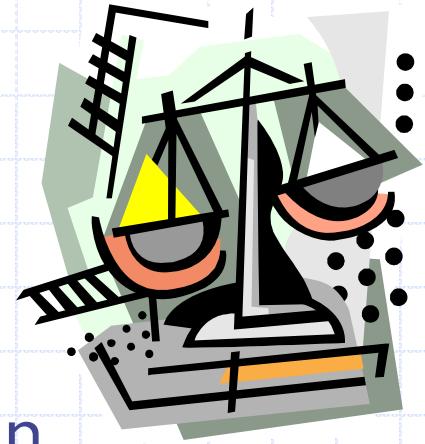
- ◆ As with novel writing, you must begin with a problem; watch the tendency to give too much background. Let the story unfold from the point of crisis.
- ◆ Every scene must move the story along to its logical, satisfying conclusion. Watch the tendency to include everything that happened.
- ◆ Show, don't tell. Write in the moment.



Memorable Opening Paragraphs

- ◆ “I was sitting in a taxi, wondering if I had overdressed for the evening, when I looked out the window and saw Mom rooting through a Dumpster. It was just after dark. A blustery March wind whipped the stream coming out of the manholes, and people hurried along the sidewalks with their collars turned up. I was stuck in traffic two blocks from the party where I was heading.”
- ◆ “I wake to the drone of an airplane engine and the feeling of something warm dripping down my chin.”
- ◆ “My father and mother should have stayed in New York where they met and married and where I was born.”

Truth in Memoir Writing



- ◆ Novelists have an advantage over memoirists: they don't have to worry as much about including real people in their stories.
- ◆ Libel/defamation hold people up to public ridicule. And generally, especially for public officials, if it's provably true—conviction, arrest record, and the like—you're safe.
- ◆ You cannot libel a dead person. But in some circumstances, their estates or survivors may sue you if your work opens them, not the dead person, up to ridicule.

What Is Truth in Memoir?

- ◆ What if what you remember is hurtful to other people?
- ◆ When you write about private citizens, you are also open to the possibility of invasion of privacy suits, even if what you write is true.

What Is Truth in Memoir?

- ◆ What if you're just writing it to let off steam?

What Is Truth in Memoir?

- ◆ What if you turn it into fiction?
 - be aware that simply changing someone's name or not being a best-seller doesn't protect you from litigation.
 - You need to be sure the person is so different from real life as to not be recognizable to people who would know him or her.

What Is Truth in Memoir?

“As has been accurately revealed by two journalists at an Internet Web site, and subsequently acknowledged by me, during the process of writing the book, I embellished many details about my past experiences, and altered others in order to serve what I felt was the greater purpose of the book. I sincerely apologize to those readers who have been disappointed by my actions.”

What Are Your Goals?

- ◆ Because of the potential to hurt yourself and others, ask:
 - Why am I writing this?
 - Who do I want to read this?
 - What do I want the reader to feel/know that he or she didn't before picking up my memoir?
 - What makes my experience special?

Resources

- ◆ *Your Life as Story* by Tristine Rainer
- ◆ *The Writer's Journey* by Chris Vogler
- ◆ *Writing the Breakout Novel* by Donald Maass
- ◆ National Association of Memoir Writers
(www.namw.org)

Questions?

Thanks for coming!

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