

# YOUR MEMOIR, FROM FIRST WORD TO MARKET

Loft Year-Long  
Creative Nonfiction Project  
Online

**Instructor:** Carolyn Holbrook

**Phone:** (612) 275-2554

**Email:** [slamgranny@msn.com](mailto:slamgranny@msn.com)

## Zoom office hours by appointment

\* Tuesdays 8:30-10:00am

\* Tuesdays 6:30-8:00pm

\* You may also feel free to call, email or text me at other times if you have questions or concerns. I am available until 9:00 pm.

## Class Zoom Link

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89778247855?pwd=X21PKOlw6s24gq7OxDqrob6YHQZp5b.1>

Meeting ID: 897 7824 7855

Passcode: 597006

I will be using Google Classroom to post announcements and assignments. Please check Google Classroom every week.

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## INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY

**Carolyn Holbrook** is a writer, educator, and an advocate for the healing power of the arts. Her memoir in essays, *Tell Me Your Names and I Will Testify* (Minn 2020), won the 2021 Minnesota Book Award for Memoir and Creative Nonfiction. She is founder and director of the Twin Cities-based BIPOC conversation series, *More Than a Single Story*. She is co-editor with David Mura of the anthology, *We Are Meant to Rise: Voices for Justice from Minneapolis to the World* (Minn & More Than a Single Story 2021), and a chapbook, *Earth Angels* (Spout Press 2020), and is co-author with Arleta Little of MN civil rights icon, Dr. Josie R. Johnson's memoir, *Hope In the Struggle* (Minn 2019). Her nonfiction book, *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Journeys: How the St. Paul Companies Leadership Initiatives in Neighborhoods Program Changed Lives and Communities* was published in 2015. Her essays have appeared in numerous anthologies, including *Blues Vision: African American Writing from Minnesota* (MNHS 2015) and *A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota* (MNHS 2016). Her TEDx talk, "The Life you Live is the

*Legacy You will Leave*” was presented at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN in 2022. She has been the recipient of numerous grants, fellowships and awards. She won the Minnesota Book Awards Kay Sexton Award in 2010 and was a 50 over 50 honoree in 2017. She holds a Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Creative Arts Leadership (Union Institute & University 2002). She teaches at the Loft Literary Center and other community venues, and at Hamline University, where she won the Exemplary Teacher award in 2014. She was Creative Nonfiction mentor for the Loft Mentor Series in 2015-2016.

<https://morethanasinglestory.com/>

<https://www.carolynleeholbrook.com/>

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*"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."*

~ Maya Angelou

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## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Everyone leads a life that is important enough to write about. Some of you have known for a while that you want to write about your unique life or a specific time in your life, or perhaps a continuous theme in your life. Some of you simply have an idea that you want to write but may not be sure what you want to say, or may be hitting blocks when you sit down to write, or you may have a draft that isn't working in certain parts. Perhaps you're unsure about how to polish your manuscript so you can feel truly confident that it's ready to pursue publication. You want to know that your memoir is the best you can make it.

Although we will focus on memoir, writers who work in other creative nonfiction genres such as personal essay, travelogue, nature writing, or narrative journalism, are also welcome. Our inspiration will be your perspective and your questions about your experience, your world, and the larger world around you. The class will combine lecture, discussion, reading, generative writing exercises, peer workshop and suggestions for revision.

One year is plenty of time to write a working draft of your memoir. Throughout the year we will visit and revisit what we need to know about how to begin your memoir, how to keep it moving from chapter to chapter, how to end it, and what to do with it once you've finished. Through reading, writing, discussion, workshopping and revising, we will study the many aspects of the craft of memoir writing: voice, setting, tone, dialogue, scene and summary, revision, editing and getting your book out into the world.

We will also meet authors, publishers and literary agents, and will develop the resources and relationships to move ahead with a writing life once the course is finished. At the end of the year, you should be equipped with the knowledge and confidence to pitch to editors and pursue publication.

## **PROJECT REQUIREMENTS/LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This year-long project is designed for students who are ready to do the serious work of shaping their nonfiction book projects. It is meant to build on students' fundamental craft knowledge as they begin to generate or shape their own work. Our focus will be equally divided between the study of craft, generating work, and responding to the work of our classmates.

### **Students who successfully complete this project will:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of various forms of creative nonfiction (CNF) used by published authors of creative nonfiction (e.g. memoir, personal essay, literary journalism, experimental/hybrid forms, etc.).
- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of the craft of CNF used by published authors of CNF (e.g. the essayistic question, voice, structure, scene, reflection, subtext, and research).
- Demonstrate an ability to apply the forms of CNF to their own writing.
- Demonstrate an ability to apply the elements of the craft of CNF to their own writing.
- Demonstrate an ability to provide constructive oral and written feedback on the work of their peers.
- Demonstrate an ability to generate 100-300 pages of new work in preparation for publication by the end of the year
- Demonstrate an ability to revise creative work that has benefitted from instructor and/or workshop feedback.

## **READING AS WRITERS**

Writers read. Writers read a lot. Throughout the year, we will read a lot, from the point of view of the maker. We will read about craft and technique, and will read a variety of memoirs and essays. Your job is to read and analyze assigned readings as a writer focusing on the craft elements of each text. (See *Tell it Slant*, "Reading as a Writer" – pg. 239-243). You will be expected to spend time reflecting on our readings and come up with at least two questions and/or observations that you would like to discuss in class. Your questions may be related to subject matter, voice, form, language, tone, handling of time, prose style, figurative language, sentence structure, essayistic questions, etc.

### **Required Reading**

Please obtain the following books

## **Craft books**

### **\* *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King**

Native novelist and scholar Thomas King explores how stories shape who we are and how we understand and interact with other people. From creation stories to personal experiences, historical anecdotes to social injustices, racist propaganda to works of contemporary Native American literature, King probes Native culture's deep ties to storytelling.

### **\* *Tell it Slant, 3rd Edition*, Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paolo**

“Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant.” With these words, Emily Dickinson offers sound advice for nonfiction writers: Tell the truth but become more than mere transcribers of daily life. Since 2003, *Tell It Slant* has set the standard for creative nonfiction instruction, showing writers how to move beyond mere facts and, instead, make the most of their own “slant” on the world.

### **\* *Living Revision*, Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew**

In *Living Revision*, author and teacher Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew guides writers through the writing and revision process. With insight and grace, Andrew asks writers to flex their spiritual muscles, helping them to transform their writing as they in turn transform themselves into more curious and reflective human beings.

## **Memoirs**

### **\* *Between Two Kingdoms. A Memoir of A Life Interrupted*, Suleika Jouad**

A deeply moving memoir of illness and recovery that traces one young woman’s journey from diagnosis to remission to re-entry into “normal” life—from the founder of *The Isolation Journals* and a subject of the Netflix documentary *American Symphony*.

### **\* *The Collected Schizophrenias*, Esme’ Weijun Wang**

An intimate, moving book written with the immediacy and directness of one who still struggles with the effects of mental and chronic illness, *The Collected Schizophrenias* cuts right to the core.

### **\* *The Way She Wants to Get There*, Mary Moore Easter**

This memoir traces the author’s development as a dancer during of the decade between 1968 and 1979, a pivotal era in Black/white relations, women's rights, and other significant developments in social traditions.

### **\* *Sinkhole*, Juliet Patterson**

Mixing autobiography, academic psychology, and an ecological history of Kansas, Patterson, a poet, examines the suicides in her family, beginning with her father’s.

### **\* *In the Company of Grace*, Jody Lulich**

*In the Company of Grace* is a moving memoir about finding courage in compassion and strength in healing—and power in finally confronting the darkness of the author’s youth.

**\* *Solito*, Javier Zamora**

A young poet tells the inspiring story of his migration from El Salvador to the United States at the age of nine in this gripping memoir of bravery, hope, and finding family.

**\* *Tender At the Bone*, Ruth Reichl**

A deliciously crafted memoir of a life defined, determined, and enhanced in equal measure by a passion for food, by unforgettable people, and by the love of tales well told. Spiced with Reichl's infectious humor and sprinkled with her favorite recipes, *Tender at the Bone* is a witty and compelling chronicle of a culinary sensualist's coming-of-age.

Other essays and memoir excerpts will also be distributed throughout the year. I encourage you to suggest readings as well.

**Recommended Reading**

*Tell Me Your Names & I Will Testify*, Carolyn Holbrook

*The Home Place*, J. Drew Lanham

*Spirit Car*, Diane Wilson

*Evidence of V*, Sheila O'Connor

*Wild Things*, Lynette Reini Grandell

*Craft In the Real World*, Matthew Saleses

***CNF/MEMOIR GUESTS***

Throughout the year, four to six visiting authors and publishing professionals will visit our class.

**Guest Authors**

Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew, *Living Revision*

Mary Moore Easter, *The Way She Wants to Get There*

Juliet Patterson, *Sinkhole*

Jody Lulich, *In the Company of Grace*

**Guest Publishing Professionals**

Erik Anderson, Senior Acquisitions Editor, University of MN Press

Others TBD

**WORKSHOPS**

We will engage in two workshops of each student's work in our winter/spring and summer terms, and one more workshop in our fall term. During summer term, we will spend less time in class. Most of your summer will be spent working on the bulk of your manuscript. I encourage you to meet in pairs or small groups outside of class to give each other support and feedback throughout the year.

### **Comments on Classmate's Work**

In preparation for workshops, you will all read each other's work and provide written comments. Learning to offer descriptive feedback on your peers' work is a key part of being in a writing community; it also enables you to see your own work more clearly. I will provide worksheets to guide us with our workshops. We will have ongoing discussions on providing useful feedback, and Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew, author of *Living Revision* will visit our class for a workshop on revision.

### **Discussion Etiquette**

You've done your reading and understand it or have interesting questions about it. You don't dominate our discussions, but contribute in relevant ways. You're respectful to your peers. You're a good listener. You don't take up all the oxygen in the room. You respect the work in front of you, and think less about your immediate emotional response to it than about how it works, and why the writer created it in the form s/he/they did.

### **A Note About Difficult Material**

Writers write about what haunts them. They write about their wounds. They write about difficult and controversial issues. Some of the material you'll be reading in class (assigned reading and classmate's work) may cause distress for some readers, especially if you are a trauma survivor. If this applies to you, please do what you can to take care of yourself so that you can engage effectively with course material and participate in class. If you need to skip a reading assignment and/or step outside during a discussion or the reading of someone's work, either for a short time or for the rest of the class session, you may do so without penalty but you should talk with me about how to make up the time and/or material. If you work with a therapist, by all means contact them. You may also want to consider the Loft's Resource List.

### **Confidentiality Agreement**

This class is built upon the shared expectation of trust and respect. An essential aspect of the course is the ability to share works-in-progress, thoughtful criticism, and new ideas in an open manner for constructive feedback and assessment. Candid exchange is premised upon an understanding that the ideas and materials will not be disseminated beyond the confines of our classroom. In addition, pre-publication use of another classmate's work could harm the potential for that work, even if such use was otherwise protected by copyright fair use. To protect the integrity of the course and the ability of students to submit their ideas and materials, students may not directly or indirectly disclose, disseminate, publish, or use the ideas, materials, submissions of any other student submitted as part of this course other than in classroom discussion, assignments, or on closed classroom discussions.

### **FINAL REVISION**

A complete revision of 100-300 pages of material written over the course of the year is due to the teaching mentor at our final class meeting on December 11. This should be a significant revision of the work submitted for workshops throughout the course. Whether you're submitting an early

draft or you believe your work is ready for publication, these pages should be polished enough that you could submit them for publication if you chose to. The teaching mentor will read and provide written and verbal feedback on the manuscript pages turned in on December 11 (not to exceed 300 double spaced pages or approximately 90,000 words); whatever is turned in on this date is the final submission. No late submissions of additional pages will be accepted. The final one to one meeting to discuss this final critique will take place no later than February 28, 2025, and will be scheduled according to student and teaching mentor convenience.

## **EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

In keeping with the Loft's mission and values, this class will be an inclusive learning community, respecting differing backgrounds and beliefs. As a community, we will be respectful to all citizens in this class, regardless of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity or gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, marital or parental status, status with regard to public assistance, or veteran status. In addition, we will gladly honor any requests to address you by an alternate name. Please feel free to share the appropriate pronoun that you would like the class to use when referring to you. Through my teaching and the content of this course, I aim to affirm people of all gender expressions and identities.

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*"Sometimes writing about a thing makes it easier to stand."*  
~ Octavia E. Butler

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## **LOFT YEAR LONG CNF PROJECT Calendar**

### **Cohort Meetings**

Via Zoom | all times listed in US Central Time

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89778247855?pwd=X21PKOlw6s24gq7OxDqrob6YHQZp5b.1>

Meeting ID: 897 7824 7855

Passcode: 597006

Participants will meet weekly as a cohort during the winter/spring term (12 weeks; February–April), will meet 8 times during the summer months (June–August); and will meet weekly again during fall term (12 weeks; September–December).

Each participant will also meet one-on-one with the teaching mentor at least four times over the course of the year. These meetings include one introductory meeting before the program kicks off in February, and a manuscript consultation session after the program concludes in December. This meeting must take place before February 28, 2025.

## **PROPOSED SCHEDULE**

*(Calendar subject to adjustment)*

### **Orientation**

\* Weds. Jan. 24, 2024 / 6:00-7:30 pm

### **Winter/Spring Term**

*Wednesdays| 6:00–9:00 p.m.*

#### **Week 1 INTRODUCTION TO EACH OTHER AND THE CLASS**

- Feb. 7
- \* Introductions and syllabus review, goals and expectations
  - \* Read Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories*
  - \* In-class writing

#### **Week 2 MOMENTS OF BEING**

- Feb. 14
- \* Read: *Tell it Slant*, “Reading as a Writer” – pg. 239-243
  - \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapter 1, “The Body of Memory,”
  - \* Read *Between Two Kingdoms. A Memoir of A Life Interrupted*, Suleika Jouad, Part 1
  - \* In Class Writing

#### **Week 3 VOICE AND PERSONA**

- Feb. 21
- \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 2, “Writing the Family.”
  - \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Appendix I: Good Habits for Healthy Writers
  - \* Read *Between Two Kingdoms. A Memoir of A Life Interrupted*, Part 2
  - \* In-class writing

#### **Wk. 4 TAKING PLACE**

- Feb. 28
- \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 3, “Taking Place: Writing the Physical World”
  - \* In-Class writing

#### **Wk. 5 GATHERING THE THREADS OF HISTORY**

- Mar. 6
- \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 4, “Gathering the Threads of History”
  - \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 11, “The Particular Challenges of CNF”
  - \* In-Class writing
  - \* Sign up for preliminary workshops
  - \* Sign up for conference with Carolyn

- Wk. 6**  
Mar. 13      **PRELIMINARY WORKSHOPS (up to 50 pgs)**  
\* Read *Tell it Slant*, “Innovative Forms: The Wide Variety of CNF”  
\* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 1, “Starting Rough”  
\* Read *Collected Schizophrenia’s*, Esme’ Weijun Wang, “Diagnosis” - “On the Ward”  
\* 2 workshops
- Wk. 7**  
Mar. 20      **PRELIMINARY WORKSHOPS**  
\* Read *Tell it Slant*, “Mixed Media, Cross-Genre, Hybrid, and Digital Works”  
\* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 2, “The Long Lovely Journey”  
\* Read *Collected Schizophrenia’s*, Esme’ Weijun Wang, “The Slender Man, The Nothing, and Me” - the end.  
\* 2 workshops
- Wk. 8**  
Mar. 27      **PRELIMINARY WORKSHOPS**  
\* Read *Tell it Slant*, “The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form”  
\* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 3, “So What?”  
\* 2 workshops
- Wk. 9**  
Apr. 3      **PRELIMINARY WORKSHOPS**  
\* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 4, “Becoming an Author”  
\* 2 workshops
- Wk. 10**  
Apr. 10      **PRELIMINARY WORKSHOPS**  
\* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 5, “Deep Listening”  
\* 2 workshops
- Wk. 11**  
Apr. 17      **PRELIMINARY WORKSHOPS**  
\* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 6, “Seeing with Others’ Eyes”  
\* 2 workshops
- Wk. 12**  
Apr. 24      **GUEST: Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew**  
\* Revision workshop  
\* Summer intentions

### **Summer Term**

*All summer Wednesday sessions meet 6:00–9:00 p.m.*

*All summer Saturday sessions meet 11:00-1:00 pm*

- Weds.  
June 12      **NEXT WORKSHOPS (up to 100 pgs)**  
\* Read *The Way She Wants to Get There*, Mary Moore Easter, Chapt. 1-10  
\* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 6, “Writing the Arts”

- \* 2 workshops
- \* Sign up for conferences with Carolyn

Weds.  
June 26

**NEXT WORKSHOPS**

- \* Read 2<sup>nd</sup> half of *The Way She Wants to Get There*, Chapt. 11-end
- \* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 7, “Reframing”
- \* 2 workshops

Sat.  
June 29

**GUEST AUTHOR / 1 WORKSHOP**

- \* Guest: Mary Moore Easter
- \* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 8, “Practicing Presence”
- \* 1 workshop

Weds.  
July 17

**NEXT WORKSHOPS**

- \* Read *Sinkhole*, Juliet Patterson, Chapt. 1-13
- \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 7 “Glorious Facts: Research and the Research Essay”
- \* 2 workshops

Weds.  
July 24

**NEXT WORKSHOPS**

- \* Read *Sinkhole* Chapt. 14-end
- \* Read *Living Revision*, Chapt. 9, “Strengthening Movement”
- \* 2 workshops

Sat.  
Aug. 3

**GUEST AUTHOR / 1 WORKSHOP**

- \* Guest: Juliet Patterson
- \* Read *Living Revision*, Chapter 10, “Finding Form”
- \* 1 workshop

Weds.  
Aug. 14

**NEXT WORKSHOPS**

- \* Read *In The Company of Grace*, Jody Lulich, Prologue-Part 3
- \* Read *Tell it Slant*, Chapt. 5, “The Body of Identity”
- \* 2 workshops

Sat.  
Aug 17

**GUEST AUTHOR**

- \* Guest: Jody Lulich
- \* Read *In The Company of Grace*, Part 4-end
- \* Sign up for final workshops

**Fall Term**

***Wednesdays| 6:00–9:00 p.m.***

- Wk. 1           **FINAL WORKSHOPS (Up to 200 pgs)**  
Sept. 18       \* Read *Tell it Slant* Chapt. 15, “Publishing your CNF”  
                  \* Read *Tell it Slant* Chapt. 16, “Putting on Our Editors’ Hats”  
                  \* 1 workshop
- Wk. 2           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Sept. 25       \* Read *Solito* by Javier Zamora, Chapt. 1-6  
                  1 Workshop
- Wk. 3           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Oct. 2         \* View *Turn Every Page*, Amazon Prime Video  
                  \* 1 Workshop
- Wk. 4           **GUEST**  
Oct. 9         \* Erik Anderson, Senior Acquisitions Editor, U of M Press  
                  \* 1 workshop
- Wk. 5           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Oct. 16        \* Read *Solito* by Javier Zamora, Chapt. 7-end  
                  \* 1 workshop
- Wk. 6           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Oct. 23        \* Guest TBD  
                  \* 1 workshop
- Wk. 7           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Oct. 30        \* Read *Tender at the Bone*, Chapt 1-9  
                  \* 1 workshop
- Wk. 8           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Nov. 6         \* Read *Tender at the Bone*, Chapt. 10-end  
                  \* 1 workshop
- Wk. 9           **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Nov. 13        \* 1 workshop
- No class November 20***  
\* Thanksgiving Week
- Wk. 10          **FINAL WORKSHOPS**  
Nov. 27        \* 1 workshop

Wk. 11      **FINAL WORKSHOPS**

Dec. 4      \* 1 workshop

Wk. 12      **FINAL WORKSHOPS**

Dec. 11      \* 1 workshop

\* Final manuscripts due

\* If you live in the Twin Cities, please drop them off at the Loft

\* If you do not live in the Twin Cities, you may send them to me via snail or email

***Final Public Reading***

Weds. January 15, 2025 | 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Online, via Zoom

***Final conference and manuscript critiques***

\* Completed by Feb. 28

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*“My heart woke me crying last night.  
How can I help, I begged.  
My heart said write the book.”  
~ Rupi Kaur*

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