



## **YOUR MEMOIR, FROM FIRST WORD TO MARKET**

Loft Year-Long Memoir Writing Project

Project Leader: Carolyn Holbrook | [slamgranny@msn.com](mailto:slamgranny@msn.com)

Wednesdays | 6-9 PM CT | Online via Zoom | all times listed in US Central Time

[Cohort Dates](#)

### **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 and 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, travelog, 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, 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 will be equipped with the knowledge and confidence to pitch to editors and pursue publication.

We will meet via Zoom for all cohort meetings for the entire year. Please consider registering for this option if you are not local to the Twin Cities, or you'd simply prefer the convenience of never having to leave your home or favorite coffee shop while working on your novel project. Log-in information for your weekly meetings will be communicated via your confirmation email.

## **PROJECT REQUIREMENTS/LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This yearlong 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.
- 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—sometimes on craft and technique, sometimes memoirs and essays. I encourage you to suggest readings as well. Your job is to

read and analyze assigned readings as a writer focusing on the craft elements of each text. As you read, you should make notes on craft points that you notice, and jot down questions. 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 for class:**

- *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King
- *Tell it Slant, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paolo
- *Between Two Kingdoms*, Suleika Jaouad
- *Briefly Perfectly Human*, Alua Arthur
- *The Girl I Am, Was, and Never Will Be: A Speculative Memoir of Transracial Adoption*, Shannon Gibney
- *Evidence of V: A Novel in Fragments, Facts, and Fictions*, Sheila O'Connor
- *Perennial Ceremony: Lessons and Gifts from a Dakota Garden*, Theresa Peterson
- *This Is Where I am*, Zeke Caligiuri
- Other essays and memoir excerpts will be distributed by the teaching mentor throughout the year

### **Recommended Reading**

- *Writing True*, Mimi Schwartz and Sondra Perl
- *Living Revision*, Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew
- *Tell Me Your Names & I Will Testify*, Carolyn Holbrook
- *The Home Place*, J. Drew Lanham
- *Spirit Car*, Diane Wilson
- *Heavy*, Kiese Laymon

### **CNF/MEMOIR GUESTS**

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

**Guest Authors: Throughout the year, four to six visiting writers and publishing**

**professionals will meet with your cohort as special guests.**

- Shannon Gibney
- Sheila O'Connor
- Zeke Caligiuri

**Guest Publishing Professionals**

- Erik Anderson, Senior Acquisitions Editor, University of MN Press
- Jennifer Thompson, literary agent at Nordlyset Literary Agency

**WORKSHOPS**

We will engage in two workshops of each student's work during winter/spring term and again during fall term. During summer term, we will spend less time in class. Most of your time during the 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. Each student will also have at least one conference with the instructor during the summer.

**COMMENTS ON STUDENT WORK**

In preparation for student workshops you will all read each other's manuscripts and provide a written critique. Learning to offer descriptive feedback to 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 help 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 me at our final class meeting on December 14. This should be a significant revision of the work submitted for workshops throughout the course. 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 14 (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 more pages will be accepted. The final one to one meeting to discuss this final critique will take place no later than February 28, 2026, 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 gender identities.