

Memoir in a Year Part II: Writing Your Book-Length Memoir

WriterHouse

January 24, 2019 – December 5, 2019

Thursdays, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Instructor: Lisa Ellison, Ed.S

Email: lisa.cooper.ellison@gmail.com

Phone: 502-640-7686

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to Memoir in a Year Part II: Drafting and Revising Your Book-Length Memoir. My name is Lisa Ellison and I'll be your instructor. Memoir in a Year Part II: Drafting and Revising Your Book-Length Memoir is a course for students who have made substantial progress toward the completion of a book-length memoir. **We will meet for 20 class sessions on the following dates: 1/24/19, 2/7/19, 2/21/19, 3/7/19, 3/21/19, 4/4/19, 4/18/19, 5/2/19, 5/16/19, 5/30/19, 6/20/19, 7/11/19, 8/8/19, 9/19/19, 9/26/19, 10/3/19, 10/17/19, 11/7/19, 11/28/19, 12/5/19.** You may purchase an optional full-manuscript review that includes a one-hour meeting during the summer to provide you with additional direction as you work on your draft. One-on-One coaching sessions and a final manuscript review are also available. The course is divided into five parts, which are described below.

Course Goals

- Provide structure, accountability, and deadlines that support the drafting and revision process
- Deepen your understanding of the memoir genre and subgenres as they pertain to student projects
- Develop a deeper understanding of your life experiences and how they impact your narrative and character arcs through the exploration of patterns and themes
- Deepen your understanding of story structure and how to structure your book

Required Texts: *Your Life as a Story* by Tristine Rainer, *The Story Cure* by Dinty Moore, *The Business of Being a Writer* by Jane Friedman, *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, and *I Am Yours* by Reema Zaman

Recommended Texts: *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* by Christopher Vogler and Michele Montez, *The Art of Memoir* by Mary Karr, *The Art of Time in Memoir* by Sven Birkerts, *Writing Life Stories* by William Roorbach, *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, *Your First Page* by Peter Selgin, and *Draft Number Four* by John McPhee

Course Organization

Part I - Orienting (1/24/18 – 2/21/18): To ensure you receive the best possible feedback, students will become familiar with class members' current drafts. To do this, we'll workshop manuscript outlines, read excerpts from Tristine Rainer's book *Your Life as a Story*, and Dinty Moore's *The Story Cure*, and complete experiential exercises designed to help you create a plan that will lead to a first draft of your book.

Part II - Drafting (3/7/18 – 5/16/18): The race is on as you work to complete the first draft of your book. Missing chapters will be drafted and previous drafts will be refined as you prepare to share your manuscript with others. During this portion of the class, we'll complete in-class writing exercises, study Joan Didion's memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, and workshop excerpts of your book.

Part III - Crafting (5/30/18 – 8/8/18): Now that you've completed your draft, we'll focus on exercises designed to help you develop a big-picture understanding of your narrative arc and your story's structure. Class activities will include designing query letters, synopses, and book proposals. While you're letting your manuscript rest, you'll serve as a beta reader for one fellow student so you can learn how to make whole-scale edits for your own project.

Part IV – Refining (9/19/18 – 10/3/18): During this portion of the class, we'll assess the progress you've made so far, workshop your synopsis, and help you develop a plan to revise your book. In-class exercises will help you begin the revision process as we study Reema Zaman's memoir *I Am Yours*.

Part V – Revising (10/17/18 – 12/5/18): Now that you have a solid revision plan, you'll work toward creating large-scale revisions of your project with class support. Revised sections of your book will be workshopped to assist you with this process. We'll do a deep dive into prologues while you read a memoir of your choice. In-class exercises will continue to support your revision process.

Methods of Instruction

This course will include in-class writing exercises, analysis of published texts, experiential activities, and instruction regarding aspects of craft that relate to your projects. Specific written feedback will be provided for student submissions that addresses both the strengths and areas of growth in your work. Brief readings and out-of-class writing assignments will be assigned to enhance classroom instruction.

Developing a Safe and Welcoming Culture

One of the goals of this class is to provide a safe and supportive atmosphere for all writers so they can take risks that lead to their most valuable work. To support this goal, I have four main policies for this class:

1. **Confidentiality:** Everything shared within the class should remain within the class, unless a student gives you express permission to share his or her ideas with others.
2. **Voluntary Sharing:** It is more important to write what is true than to write what is acceptable. In that regard, sharing during feedback periods is always voluntary. While it's important to take risks and participate fully, please share work that feels ready for a general audience. More information regarding voluntary sharing will be provided during the first class.
3. **Respectful Feedback:** The focus of this class is to help writers write openly and freely. Feedback should always focus on specific elements of the text as they pertain to craft. It should be free of judgements regarding the author, behavior of characters, or motivations for writing a specific piece. Instead, focus your feedback on what touches you, what you like, and what makes you curious about the writer's work. More information regarding feedback will be provided during the first and second classes.
4. **Emotional Responsibility.** Our job is to respect and honor the feelings of others but not to fix them. As a result, we will listen carefully and pay attention, but refrain from giving advice. Tears are a sign of deep love. Should they occur, we will honor them with a moment of silence and a hand to the heart, representing our heart connection to one another. Laughter is also welcome.

Workshop Expectations

Author

You will have up to five opportunities to workshop a maximum of 7-10 pages during this class. To ensure the best possible feedback, please adhere to the following guidelines:

- Submit your piece via email **by FRIDAY evening** prior to your workshop date to ensure ample reading time.
- Format: Word or PDF document, 12-point font, double spaced document, 1-inch margin. Add page numbers to the upper right hand corner. Add your name, left aligned, to the header. If you have any questions about how to do this, please let me know. Please respect the length requirements.

Reader Expectations

- Print student pieces and bring marked copies to class for our discussion
- Read all student work. Provide written comments in the margins or on the back of the piece, using the following format:
 - What the piece is about
 - Three strengths of the piece
 - Three questions you had about the piece

- Because we will be reading works in progress, feedback should be brief. You may point out additional craft-related issues within the piece; however, please **do not** attempt to copyedit or line edit student work. Our focus remains on the development of the piece, not polishing it for publication.

Attendance

Please contact the instructor ahead of time via email (lisa.cooper.ellison@gmail.com) or text (502-640-7686) if you will be late or need to miss a class.

Accessibility

This class is designed to be accessible to students of all levels and abilities. If you require specific accommodations or modifications that would be covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please let me know by the end of our first class.