

# **Memoir in a Year, Part 2**

## **Finish and Revise the Draft of Your Book**

### **Syllabus and Schedule**

**Dates:** First and third Thursdays of every month:

March 4, March 18, April 1, April 15, May 6, May 20, June 3, June 17, July 1, July 15, August 5, August 19, September 2, September 16, October 7, October 21, November 4, November 18, December 2, December 16, January 6, January 20, February 3, February 17. Optional generative four-hour “writing marathons, 9:30-2:00 PM: April 29, July 29, October 28, January 27. We will also arrange for some optional socially distanced, outdoor social gatherings, dates TBD.

**Time:**

Mornings 9:30-12:30

**Place:**

Zoom

**Instructor:**

Sharon Harrigan

We will meet for 12 months, for a total of 24 three-hour classes, plus four optional four-hour generative “writing marathons,” plus optional 15-30 minute one-on-one “debriefing” sessions with the instructor after a student is workshopped, plus a 60-minute one-on-one meeting with the instructor at the end of the year. Each class will have two five-minute breaks. The in-class writing will be done off-screen, which also helps give a welcome rest for our eyes.

Every class will include three parts.

The first hour will be focused on craft. In some classes, we will begin with a discussion of a chapter from craft books, including *Your Life as Story* by Tristine Rainer, *To Show and To Tell* by Philip Lopate, and *The Art of Memoir* by Mary Karr. We will also discuss craft essays by Ann Hood, Debra Gwartney, Allison K. Williams, and others. As a class, we will read two or three memoirs that were published during the past two years and that show a broad range of possible structures. In *Memoir in a Year Part 1*, we read two foundational, or classic, memoirs—*Wild* and *The Glass Castle*. This year we will branch out to see what is being done right now. Reading very recent work is also a form of literary citizenship, to support fellow writers who deserve a broader audience. The range of structures and styles is meant to show there is more than one way to write a memoir. We will discuss each book over several classes, focusing each class on one or two a particular topics, such as structure, voice, beginnings and endings, and character development (including the “I” as a character), suspense, pacing, and jumping through time.

The second hour will be in-class writing exercises, based on prompts. We will do a silent meditation and write for 15-20 minutes, then read our writing aloud to the class. Sharing is optional, and it's possible to pass, but reading work aloud is a rich and rewarding experience that can teach us a lot, so it is encouraged.

The third hour will be devoted to workshopping. Three students will submit 7-10 pages for each class, a week before the workshop, so each student will be workshopped every three classes, or 8 times total. Students who are still working on completing a full first draft will be encouraged to continue to write 10 new draft pages every two weeks until they have a complete story arc and have written scenes for each of the "10 essential elements" of their story, which we listed in Part 1. Those who are ready to start polishing their pages will be encouraged to revise 10 pages every two weeks. Students will work with "writing buddies" to help them stay on track, making a weekly goal and checking in each week to see if the goal was met. The purpose of workshopping is not just to consider the piece at hand but to help the writer figure out how it fits into the overall arc of the whole book. Students are encouraged to think of themselves as "coaches," not "judges," and to provide feedback that is encouraging, yet honest. Learning to write constructive and helpful workshop comments is an important part of each student's training, and the process of giving workshop feedback should be considered a learning opportunity.

The craft section of class will sometimes be used to share exercises given as homework, including the writing of outlines, revising the "10 essential elements," revisiting the story arc, developing motifs, and finding places where gaps need to be filled or passages need to be condensed. We will further develop our "voice" through mimicking exercises and exposure to excerpts from a range of work by authors with distinctive writing styles. We will also occasionally focus on writing at the sentence level, e.g. avoiding cliches, using fresh similes and metaphors, showing instead of naming emotions, using body language effectively, varying sentence length and rhythms, and using punctuation properly. Students may also be asked to read one memoir (of their choice) and present what they've learned to the class.

At the end of 12 months, we will have an end-of-year celebration/reading, and students will be encouraged to bring guests. Towards the end of the year, we will also discuss options for sending our work out into the world: how to query agents and editors.

At the last class, students will have an opportunity to give a copy of their entire revised manuscripts to the instructor, who will read them, comment on them, and meet individually with students to discuss after the class is over. This is an optional part of the class, and there will be an additional fee of \$50/hour.

All students, whether they want a manuscript consultation or not, are encouraged to have a final 60-minute consultation with the instructor.

Students who would like additional instruction at any time can arrange for coaching or editing sessions at \$50/hour.

Books used: *Your Life as Story* by Tristine Rainer, *The Heart and Other Monsters* by Rose Andersen, and at least one of the following: *Everything Is Under Control* by Phyllis Grant, *Heavy* by Kiese Laymon, *Black Widow* by Leslie Streeter, *Late Migration* by Margaret Renkl. Other craft chapters or essays will be provided by the instructor.