

**COURSE OUTLINE**  
**Reminiscence: A Creative Writing Workshop**

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**4/13/17, SESSION 1**

**Introduction: Class overview**

We've all heard of and read autobiographies. They move in a dutiful line from birth to wherever the end point is. But memoir is much different. It narrows the lens and focuses on a time in our life that was unusually vivid. It could be some period in childhood or adolescence, or a stage that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance. In other words, memoir comprises a slice of our life. By creating a narrative about an earlier period in our lives, we'll arrive at a truth that is ours alone, not quite like that of anyone else who was present at the same events.

In this workshop, you'll be focusing on periods that have particular significance for you and that may end up being reflective in some ways of you as a person. As William Zinsser says in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, "Memoir is how we try to make sense of who we are, who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us." Memoir uses a narrow lens from which to visit the past—for example, childhood, adolescence, travel, public service, or some other special circumstance.

Jill Ker Conway, author of *When Memory Speaks*, claims that "We travel through life guided by an inner life plot—part the creation of family, part the internalization of broader social norms, part the function of our imaginations and our own capacity for insight into ourselves.... **Yet we are all unique, and so are our stories. We should pay close attention to our stories**" (177).

Writing memoir is like having a personal penny that you've hidden for someone else to discover. It also will help you to see more clearly your past and present selves. Whenever we engage ourselves at a deeper level and reconstruct some aspect of our former selves, we are increasing our self-understanding.

I'm hoping you'll enrich each other by your responses to the readings and to the memoir moments you share. This workshop is designed for those who don't necessarily view themselves as writers but who wish to use that medium for self-exploration. As long as you can write a clear sentence and paragraph, you should have the skills necessary to participate in this class.

Since I'll be responding to the pieces you submit via email, basic email and Internet skills are required.

Three other things you need for this class:

1. You have to write.
2. You have to read.
3. You have to get enlightened feedback.

Each week I'll bring in a different technique to discuss as well as a sample reading of the technique in action.

#### **IN-CLASS:**

- **Discussion of imagery and writing sample**
- **Preparation for first writing assignment**

#### **DUE BEFORE 4/20/17:**

Please introduce yourself by responding to the following in an email at your earliest convenience:

- Where do you currently live and how did you end up there?
- Are you currently retired or are you still involved in a career?
- Do you have children? Grandchildren?
- Why are you taking this class?

- Have you done much writing?
- What are you hoping to take away from this workshop?
- What memoirists have you read?
- Briefly describe your email/computer skills?

**Please send me your answers in the body of an email: [lmackenzie@pacbell.net](mailto:lmackenzie@pacbell.net) (the letter before “Mackenzie” is an “L” and not an “i”). I’ll then forward your brief bios to other class members so you can begin entering each other’s worlds.**

**DUE ON 4/20/17:**

- **Bring a photo.** As you browse your photo albums, be looking for one that especially grabs your interest. It could be one of you at any age and it doesn’t have to involve just you alone.
- **Bring 5 copies of your sensory detail assignment to share with a small group. Limit its length to no more than 500 words of double-spaced text.**

***4/20/17, SESSION 2***

**IN-CLASS:**

- **Discussion of narrative elements & and more work with sensory detail**
- **Reading and discussion of writing sample**
- **In-class writing about photo you brought**
- **Small group critiques**

***4/27/17, SESSION 3***

**DUE FOR 4/27/17:**

- **Bring 5 copies of your response to the photo writing assignment to share with a small group, 500 words maximum.**

**IN-CLASS on 4/27/17:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: plot/story**
- **Reading and discussion of writing sample**
- **In-class writing**
- **Small group critiques**

***5/4/17, SESSION 4***

**DUE FOR 5/4/17:**

- **Draft of exercise in plot & form. Bring 5 copies to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 5/4/17:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: character**
- **Reading and discussion of writing sample**
- **In-class writing**
- **Small group critiques**

***5/11/17, SESSION 5***

**DUE FOR 5/11/17:**

- **Draft of exercise on character. Bring 5 copies to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 5/11/17:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: place/setting**
- **Reading and discussion of writing sample**
- **In-class writing**
- **Small group critiques**

***5/25/17, SESSION 6***

**DUE FOR 5/25/17:**

- **Draft of exercise on place/setting. Bring 5 copies of your sample writing on place to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 5/25/17:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: scene & dialogue**
- **Reading and discussion of writing sample**
- **In-class writing**
- **Small group critiques**

**6/1/17, SESSION 7**

**DUE FOR 6/1/17:**

- **Draft of exercise on scene & dialogue. Bring 5 copies to share with a small group.**

**IN-CLASS 6/1/17:**

- **Discussion of narrative element: point of view & tone**
- **Reading and discussion of writing sample**
- **In-class writing**
- **Small group critiques**

• **6/8/17, SESSION 8**

**DUE FOR 6/8/17: finish reading *This Boys' Life*.**

**IN-CLASS:**

- **Discussion of *This Boys' Life*.**
- **Writing prompt**