

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
The Art of Memoir
Fall 2023/ Tuesdays 10 am - 12 pm
September 19 - October 24
Instructor: Caroline Goodwin, MFA
cdgoodwin@berkeley.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION: With the memoir form, writers have the opportunity to bring the people, places and events of their lives into focus on the page. In a lively, supportive atmosphere, students in this course will find the critique and accountability necessary to the art of writing memoir. Assignments will include brief readings and prompts designed to spark the imagination and celebrate the individual voice. As a community of learners dedicated to the task of recording the past in meaningful ways, we will dive in to our stories, writing and listening to one another with intention. We will challenge one another to discover the powerful complexity of our own experiences and to share them in writing with courage and conviction.

WEEKLY OUTLINE:

Class 1: Introductions and getting to know you. What brings you to the memoir? Setting goals for the next 6 weeks. Brainstorming how to follow through with writing goals.

For next week: create your writing plan and follow through. Come prepared to share any obstacles or triumphs. Continue free-writing to the prompt “I don’t know why I remember...” then shape and bring a short scene next week that grows out of the free-writes (750 words max).

Class 2: The power of writing lists. How do we get our arms around the material from our pasts and distill our stories into writing? Sharing our short scenes and any surprises or revelations we encountered during the week.

For next week: follow through on your writing plan and come prepared to share any obstacles or triumphs. Keep listing your own shimmering images/memories as they come to you (750 words max).

Class 3: The memoir as healer. What has your memoir taught you thus far about yourself and your life experience? About the larger context of your story?

For next week: Research some details that might fill in the cultural and historical context of your story. What was going on around the narrator (you)? This can include music trends, clothing, values, cultural conflicts, etc. Have fun with this.

Class 4: Character development in the memoir. How do we develop scenes with dialogue and gesture when the characters are ourselves and our families?

For next week: develop a scene between two central characters. Think of this as a “dance” in which each person makes a move and the other reacts or responds (750 words max).

Class 5: The heart of the story. How would you define the narrative line of tension in your own story? What challenges does your narrator encounter and what resources do they possess?

For next week: choose your strongest scene to read aloud to the class next week. Time yourself for up to 5 minutes. Keep writing/reading memoir!

Class 6: Reading & celebration of our work together during the class. Sharing our plans to continue to grow our projects well into the future.