Overview

Each session of this class will begin with a brief lecture about writing, with an emphasis on issues specific to writing memoir. We will touch on features found in good writing, but the focus will mostly be on the process of writing well. The first session will include some in-class writing. In each subsequent session, we’ll begin with a craft-and-process lecture, then discuss works written by members of the workshop. Given the size of the class, three to four writers will have an opportunity to be “workshopped” at each session. Students may opt out of sharing their work if they want, but will be invited to contribute to the conversations. Students who already have a memoir in progress may workshop an excerpt from it. Students may work on one original piece over the course of the workshop, following the steps of the writing process; or they may write several different pieces—it’s their call. Students will send me their finished pieces at the end of the workshop, and I may, students’ permission and agreement, edit and post them on a blog I hope to start that focuses on memoir as a literary art. Students scheduled to read at each next session will need to share their work with the group beforehand by email. Please note that students will not receive “assignments.” The emphasis will be on students finding and writing stories of their own choosing, not on fulfilling projects prescribed by the instructor.

Week One

What is a memoir?
Writing process: an overview
Writing from prompts
Freewriting
Week Two

The essence of story
Recognizing the story in the facts
Freewriting--with a compass
Rough draft

Week Three

Writing process: remembering the forgotten
Using “source materials”—diaries, letters, journals
Public documents—newspapers, magazines...
The parallel timelines trick
Finished first draft

Week Four

Writing process: revision
Separating you the editor from you the writer
Story structure frameworks
Theme
Second draft

Week Five

Writing process: line and content editing
Drama, description, and action
What is good dialog?
How to kill your babies

Week Six

Language editing
Syntax, word choice, errors
Privacy issues
Submissions