

## MASTER THE MEMOIR

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### I. MEET THE MEMOIR

*A special kind of autobiography, usually involving a public portion of the author's life as it relates to a person, historic event, or thing. The text is about the personal knowledge and/or experiences of the author.*—Barbara Doyen, literary agent

#### A. Memoir, Defined

1. That \_\_\_\_\_ Touch

2. Not \_\_\_\_\_

3. Not \_\_\_\_\_

**Examples: (Classic/ABA/General Market):** *An American Life*, Annie Dillard; *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt; *Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott; *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert; *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline Woodson; *The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls; *Rare Bird*, Anna Whiston-Donaldson; *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom; *Two-Part Invention*, Madeleine L'Engle; *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion

**Examples (CBA):** *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller; *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*, Ben Carson with Cecil Murphey; *I Would Die for You*, Brent and Deanna Higgins; *A Widow's Journey*, Gayle Roper; *Out of the Dust*, Avis Goodhart with Marti Pieper; *Same Kind of Different as Me*, Ron Hall and Denver Moore with Lynn Vincent; *Thin Places: A Memoir*, Mary DeMuth

*"Writers are the custodians of memory."* —William Zinsser, author and professor

## B. Why write memoir?

- Self-\_\_\_\_\_.
- Legacy
- Gift
- But NOT \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

## C. Types of Memoir

A. F\_\_\_\_\_

B. I\_\_\_\_\_

C. O\_\_\_\_\_

D. H\_\_\_\_\_

E. Make sure to \_\_\_\_\_ memoir (see examples).

**Reflection:** *Why do you want to write a memoir? What are some of the challenges you anticipate?*

### III. CONNECTING POINTS

*I find interesting characters or lessons that resonate with people and sometimes I write about them in the sports page, sometimes I write them in a column, sometimes in a novel, sometimes a play or sometimes in nonfiction. But at the core I always say to myself, 'Is there a story here? Is this something people want to read?' I never think that just because I'm saying something, it's important. I've never felt that.—Mitch Albom*

#### A. Remember Your Reader

1. Be \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Be \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Tell the \_\_\_\_\_ as you \_\_\_\_\_ it.
4. Show that you've \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Include \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ experiences.

*Why do people relate to the book [Wild]? They saw themselves in me. Sometimes they had a similar experience, lost someone they loved deeply or they went on a big journey. There are many different ways for people to access the story on a personal level. —Cheryl Strayed*

#### B. Borrow the Novelist's Tools

1. N \_\_\_\_\_ Arc
2. C \_\_\_\_\_
3. D \_\_\_\_\_
4. I \_\_\_\_\_ and M \_\_\_\_\_

*When nonfiction is raised to an art, it's usually because the writer imposed on the facts an organizing shape or notion—an idea—that hadn't been attached to them before. —William Zinsser*

5. Setting and \_\_\_\_\_ Detail

6. T \_\_\_\_\_

7. V \_\_\_\_\_

My equation: Creative \_\_\_\_\_ + Consistent \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_  
in His Word = **Your Writing** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection:** *Which novelist's tool do you find you use most naturally? Which is harder for you? Establish your voice (the hardest thing to do in writing, but the single most important step to becoming successful). —Chip MacGregor, literary agent*

#### **IV. BACK TO THE ATTIC: Memoir-Writing Process**

*The best memoirs, I think, forge their own forms. The writer of any work, and particularly any nonfiction work, must decide two crucial points: what to put in and what to leave out.*

—Annie Dillard

##### **A. Collection**

1. Think \_\_\_\_\_

*Many of the stories in my book are about small episodes that were not objectively "important" but that were important to me. Because they were important to me they also struck an emotional chord with readers, touching a universal truth that was important to them.*

—William Zinsser

2. Listen \_\_\_\_\_ .

3. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ .

4. Disregard \_\_\_\_\_ , whether from inside or out.

5. Organize your material into an \_\_\_\_\_ that may change as you go along.

### **B. Direction**

1. Hurry up and \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Pay attention to emerging \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

### **C. Selection**

1. Choosing what to \_\_\_\_\_ is as important as choosing what to \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Keep your goals, \_\_\_\_\_ (s) and \_\_\_\_\_ in mind.

### **D. Reflection**

1. Think like a \_\_\_\_\_ to keep the reader engaged.

2. But be careful to include moments of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ about the action to maintain an emotional connection with your readers.

**Reflection:** *Do you understand the difference between narrative and reflective elements of memoir? Give an example (written or verbal) of a life-incident that will work best in written form with the addition of reflection.*

*Fact without incident, thought, connection to something larger, interrogation, and speculation, is often merely nostalgia. Memoir exists to take us further into the future, not to keep us rooted in the past. It's the layers of detail, event, reflection, and the writer's mind and heart at work that create whatever meaning we make of experience. —Lee Martin*

## Resource List, Master the Memoir

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### EXAMPLES OF MEMOIR:

#### Classic/ABA/General Market

*An American Life*, Annie Dillard

*Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt

*Bird by Bird*, Anne Lamott

*Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert

*Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline Woodson

*The Glass Castle*, Jeannette Walls

*Rare Bird*, Anna Whiston-Donaldson

*Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom

*Two-Part Invention*, Madeleine L'Engle

*The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion

#### CBA/Christian Market

*Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller

*Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*, Ben Carson with Cecil Murphey

*I Would Die for You*, Brent and Deanna Higgins

*Out of the Dust*, Avis Goodhart with Marti Pieper

*Same Kind of Different as Me*, Ron Hall and Denver Moore with Lynn Vincent

*Thin Places: A Memoir*, Mary DeMuth

*A Widow's Journey*, Gayle Roper

### MEMOIR WRITING TIPS/HOW-TO'S:

Judith Barrington, *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art*

Annie Dillard, *Modern American Memoirs*

Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything Else in Between*

Natalie Goldberg, *Old Friends Far and Wide: The Practice of Writing a Memoir*

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction and Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past*