

'As Time Goes By – Memoir Writing'

Session 1 – 22 February 2021

Introduction: From 'Benalla Writers' to 'Writing Workshop' to 'As Time Goes By'

What is memoir? How does it differ from autobiography?

"Memoir is a unique genre—it's not autobiography or a chronological retelling of one's entire life events. Rather, it's telling a narrow and specific story around a life theme or event, and importantly, the interpretation of those events and what they mean for all of us looking forward. People write memoirs about all sorts of life events, major and small: divorcing their partner, learning to surf, hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. There is always something learned, which is then shared.... Memoirs are worth reading in their own right. The memoirist can teach you a new lesson about the world that you could find instructive, interesting, or comforting. Memoirs are like getting a secret peek into someone's life—but they *want* you to peek. And more than that, memoirists want you to get inside, to swim around, to drink." [7 Books to Teach You How to Write a Memoir](#) - Ricki Tremblay blogging in 'The Spellbinding Shelf' (2021)

"Writing a memoir is not the same as writing an autobiography. In an autobiography, you typically start at the beginning of your life and record all the details you can remember, chronologically. In a memoir, you take a slice from your life—a particular theme or lesson or flavor of experience—and write about that, pretty much ignoring the rest....authors with a special story to tell generally write memoirs, not autobiographies. They focus on an aspect of their life that is most unusual or fascinating..." Blogger Jessi Rita Hoffman, [7 Common Mistakes in First Time Memoir Writing](#)

Some features of our class

- The use of monthly topics – 'memoir fragments' . We have developed a rich library of topics over the past five years, largely from ABC Open's '500 words' project, but increasingly from a diverse range of sources, including ourselves!
- Developing our own voice – encouraging and supporting others
- Editing suggestions – our very gentle approach to suggesting edits
- Word Limits – aiming towards the target, but no penalties for not meeting it
- Writing can be a cathartic process – looking after our personal well being
- Confidentiality issues arise when writing about real people (sometimes doing so negatively)
- Handling gender and other sensitive or ethical issues in our stories –writing memoir can be a cathartic process; issues arise re the ethics of writing about eg children, and around finding truth in memoir when people have different recollections of the same events.
- Poetry as Memoir... Paula Alice Lee, Betty Milligan.....
- and in 2021, readings and discussions to develop our understanding of the nature of memoir and memoir writing.

Sharing of February stories:

- 'One Moment This Year' (2020)
- 'A Love Letter to Travel'
- Alternate topic (for new class members) 'Grandparents'

Upcoming Topics

March:

'Too Hard Basket' – write about a time when you faced a dilemma which might have to be put into your 'too hard basket'. Unravel what happened, whether it was a 'problem solved', was resolved over time or perhaps remains in your too hard basket to this day.

An alternate topic for new members of class

'New in Town' - Have you ever been the new person in town? Or did someone else's arrival have a profound impact on you? Share your story in 500 words.

April: "You can learn about writing memoirs from reading them...Reading memoir is an exciting and engaging opportunity to create and experience connectivity in the mundane, the everyday, the quotidian and the real, the gritty, the universal. What develops between memoirist and reader is a type of friendship that lets us know that no one is ever really alone in their story". Ricki Tremblay 2021 (refer above')

'A memoir which has meant something to me' Head for your bookshelf, the library or an online book store to retrieve a memoir which has meant something to you. When did it enter your life? How did it then, or does it now, relate to your life story?

Alternate (for new members to class)

'Someone who shaped me' - How did you become who you are? Think about someone who has influenced your life and start writing .

May:

'Curved Ball' – Write about a time in your life when you felt that you were thrown a curved ball. The 'curved ball' may, for example, have been a health/other biological issue, an issue in pursuing your career or business, and more. What happened? What did it mean to you at the time? What does it mean to you now, reflecting back over your life.

Alternate (for new members to class)

'The Year that Made Me' – (A topic drawn from ABC programs as catalyst when interviewing actual or future Australian living treasures.) Write about a year which made a particular difference in your life's journey. Over to you!

Substitute Topics -- Keep an **'Ideas Piggy Bank'** (a container, perhaps a loved old biscuit tin or decorated box, of memorabilia such as old photographs; tickets (of all sorts); jewellery; tools; and other 'ephemera' which contains memories for you); also **'a little book of triggers'** or journal including reflections on triggers.... If a set topic doesn't appeal to or 'work' for you, choose two elements from either of these sources and write a story of about, each of 250 words or so on each. (Please note – towards the end of the year we do draw upon these resources for shared monthly topics).

Reference List – next month

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