

## Adventures in Writing the Memoir 11/17/20

Christopher and Linda Drajem's presentation on *Wandering Close to Home: A Gay Son and his Feminist Mother's Journey to Transform Themselves and Their Family*

### Memoir Prompts

#### 1. If you are not sure where to start—

What do you want to remember? List some important stories from your life that give you joy or make you laugh or that you want your children or grandchildren to know.

List without censoring in no particular order.

Leave your list for a while. Then come back to it, add or subtract. Select and expand on one story with lots of detail to make it clear to a reader why you remember it. Is there a particular theme that emerges? Ask a sympathetic friend to read it and ask you questions like: Can you tell me more about.....? What other details can you add?

What do you want to forget? Again list in no particular order. Sometimes negative memories have such power. Again leave it for a day. Come back and add or subtract. Expand on one. Where were you? What did you see, hear, taste, smell, touch (or at least as many senses as you can.) Don't force.

Again ask a sympathetic friend to read and respond with the same questions as above.

#### 2. If you know what you want to write about, go for it. Again focus on one experience at time. At some time in your process try to make the experience come alive for the reader by adding lots of sense detail. A friendly reader can tell you where there are gaps in your story.

What are some themes you could focus on? Your relationship to a parent or a sibling, your feelings about food, your fear that you overcame, etc.

Remember a memoir is NOT an autobiography. It should have a focus of some sort, a point in time, a path toward change, a battle with a disease, a survivor of abuse. There are so many memoirs to read and get inspired by. See Maya Angelou's many memoirs, current memoirs of harsh growing up tales like *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance, *Educated* by Tara Westover; relationship with a family member like Vivian Gornik's *Fierce Attachments* or with a failed marriage like Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*, religious transformation in Kathleen Norris' *Cloister Walk*.

See the back of Mary Karr's *The Art of Memoir* for an exhaustive list of great memoirs.

### Memoir Resources:

Judith Barrington, *Writing the Memoir*, 2002  
Frances Caballo, *Social Media Just for Writers*, 2016  
Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*, 2006  
Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir*, 2015  
William Kenower, *Fearless Writing*, 2017  
Courtney Maum, *Before and After the Book Deal: A Writer's Guide to Finishing, Publishing, Promoting & Surviving Your First Book*, 2020  
Ryan Van Cleave, *The Weekend Book Proposal*, 2014

Our Publisher: No Frills BuffaloPublishing, [mark@NFBpublishing.com](mailto:mark@NFBpublishing.com)

Other publishing resources:

*Poets and Writers Magazine*, *Writers Digest Magazine*, *Writers Market*,  
*Publishers Marketplace* web site

Other web resources in the books cited above