Telling True Stories: Using Fictional Technique for Memoirs and Other Nonfiction

Lecturer: Moira Farr

Days: Wednesdays, March 11th - April 15th

Time: 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Location: Rm. 14, Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre (355 Cooper St.)

This course will explore the historical roots of nonfiction writing and its contemporary practice, and offer participants a chance to hone their own nonfiction writing skills. A weekly mix of lecture and workshop exercises.

Class #1
Introduction
A brief historical overview. We’ll explore the evolution of nonfiction and memoir writing through the ages, from ancient texts to modern bestsellers. How -- and why -- is it that we are “hardwired” for stories?

Exercise
Asking ourselves questions that explore who we are and how we see the world.

Class #2
Early examples of contemporary memoir that inspired the evolution of a whole new popular genre. The birth of “the new journalism” in the 1960s, with practitioners such as Joan Didion, Gay Talese, Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe sparking an explosion of nonfiction writing.

Exercise
Tapping memory to tell vivid and compelling stories.

Class #3
The elements of storytelling are the same whether telling a true story or a fictional one. A look at how we can use classic story structure to keep readers reading. Useful reference texts.

Exercise
Scene-setting; describing people
Class #4
What is “style”? Understanding the mechanics of language to cultivate your own unique style.

Exercise
Improve these sentences!

Class #5
The ethics of telling true stories. How do we know what we know? How well does memory serve us? Best practices for non-fiction writers. Notorious literary frauds.

Exercise
Reconstructing real events from memory.

Class #6
Reading for inspiration; practising your craft; the pain and pleasure of writing memoir.
Publishing and self-publishing.