Section 4, Writing Compelling Creative Nonfiction Books

Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat

June 16-20, 2014
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. each day
Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., Madison

UW-Madison Continuing Studies & UW-Madison Dept. of English

Instructor: Laurie Scheer

Within recent literary history, the genre of creative nonfiction has grown in leaps and bounds. Writing fact with the flair of fiction is appealing to many writers, especially those who are trained in journalism and technical writing.

This new enthusiasm for writing creative nonfiction does not include the tedious essays you might have suffered through learning to write in school. Instead creative nonfiction allows you to use all of the tools of the fiction writer to develop factual material, whether that is material based on your own life or on someone or something else. This genre of writing also allows you to expound upon a favorite topic, issue, or cause, or explore a time and place through writing.

This week long course helps you develop or refine your nonfiction writing skills through one-on-one guidance from your instructor and feedback from your fellow classmates. During the week long course we'll address how to gather material for your creative nonfiction essays and books. We'll discuss personal essays vs. professional essays. Favored general topics such as writing about family and writing about place-home and away-are explored.

Each topic includes an excerpt (sometimes more) from the top writers in creative nonfiction today. We'll guide you through reading these excerpts as a writer, seeing what you can glean for your own work from each. There will be in-class writing exercises and a final writing assignment involving a 2,000 word essay that you may complete before the week’s end or by a deadline date to be determined during the week of class.

Additionally, the class will examine some established literary journalists and their work to learn about their research and how research is incorporated within creative nonfiction articles and books.

Your work as a creative nonfiction writer is encouraged. Tips regarding resources for publishing your work along with an exploration of the creation of a book proposal will be offered at the end of the week.
Laurie Scheer, Media Goddess, is a former vice president of programming for WE: Women's Entertainment. She has worked as an assistant, d-girl, and producer for ABC, Viacom, Showtime, and AMC-Cablevision. Laurie has been an instructor at numerous universities across the US including Northwestern, UCLA, American University and Yale. She is the author of a book about working in Hollywood entitled Creative Careers in Hollywood and her DVD How to Pitch and Sell Your Screenplay has been a perennial favorite at screenwriting events. As a professional speaker, she has appeared at annual conventions for NAB, NATPE, The Great American Pitch Fest, Screenwriters' World, Reel Screen, WIFV, FTX West, the Willamette Writers Conference. She has served as a judge for numerous screenplay competitions, film festivals, and the International Emmys. She is currently an Associate Faculty Associate/ Writing Mentor with UW Madison’s Continuing Studies Writing Department where she is critiquing writers’ works, conducting numerous online and in-person courses, and the Director of the annual Writer’s Institute. She is also the Managing Editor of the new anthology, The Midwest Prairie Review. Her current interest is in exploring ways to preserve good storytelling within the 21st century transmedia marketplace and sharing her new book The Writer's Advantage: A Toolkit for Mastering Your Genre (Michael Wiese Productions, 2014) with writers in-person, online, and worldwide.

Syllabus
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DAY 1
Introductions
Definition of Creative Nonfiction-Just exactly what is this type of writing all about?
1. Creative nonfiction vs. nonfiction
2. The difference is YOU
3. Choosing the right slant for your writing.

Assignment: Begin to solidify the topic you wish to explore for your creative nonfiction book. Why should you be the author of this book? What is the slant/p.o.v. you are planning to utilize regarding this topic? How is that slant/p.o.v. different from other writers who have chosen this topic?

DAY 2
Gathering, researching and organizing material
1. Basic resources for all writers-where to begin with personal artifacts and public research
2. What are the best ways to research your topic based on the story you want to tell. Literary journalism vs. creative nonfiction.
3. Now that you have all of your material, what is the best way to organize it

In Class writing assignment – a personal essay
Assignment: Study your subject matter—how has it been addressed previously in other books. Submit your outline for the steps you will take during your research and how you will organize the material.

DAY 3
Writing about Family and Place—Home and Away
1. Examining creative nonfiction essays about family and place – how have others addressed basic human needs and wants
2. Is your topic and the way you will choose to write it one that will resonate to a wide variety of readers or to a select few?

In Class writing assignments – short essays about family and place

Assignment: Continue to hone and define your book idea. You may begin writing your 2,000 word essay or refine a chapter from an existing piece of creative nonfiction writing or article.

DAY 4
Book proposal basics.
1. Elements of a book proposal
2. Why are books proposals necessary?

In Class writing assignment – Write the Overview section of your book

Assignment: Continue to write your chosen essay/chapter or begin to outline your book proposal.

DAY 5
Continuing your life as a writer including tips on publishing
1. Literary magazines, websites, apps, and publishers – what are the outlets for creative nonfiction writers
2. How to begin to formulate your creative nonfiction writing brand
3. Next steps you’ll need to take to get your writing out into the readers’ hands

Workshop attendees will present their creative nonfiction book ideas and the research they have completed or plan to complete along with their next steps. This presentation will also serve as a beginning pitch for their essay and book ideas.

Credit Option: Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others’ work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.