Section 7, Writing Compelling Creative Nonfiction Books

Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat
June 15-19, 2015
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: Brad Schreiber
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Writers of fact who exhibit the flair of fiction stylists are the reason creative nonfiction is reshaping publishing today. Our week together will include a diverse family of writers, including those who pen how-to books, history, essays, politics, biographies, humor, food, regional and more.

This week-long course helps you develop or refine your nonfiction writing skills in many areas, including one-on-one guidance from the instructor, enjoyable flash writing exercises in class, overnight assignments and lively group discussion.

Each session, the instructor will comment on students’ 2000-word excerpts of any creative nonfiction project they wish to have critiqued. Students are asked to email in advance those double-spaced excerpts.

Also, an entire session will be dedicated to the component parts of a book proposal and how it not only helps you sell your project but also helps clarify and organize your thoughts creatively.

MONDAY: The Core of a Nonfiction Story and New Directions in Its Telling

Whether you are writing about your own past or the lives of those you have researched, understanding the major dramatic conflict of your work, boiled down to its essence, is important to timely completion of the work, including fewer rewrites. In spending a day on Story for nonfiction, we will also look at recognizing themes in the stories we tell and how going back to theme helps the writer overcome roadblocks in writing.

We’ll communally create a logline for a very recognizable work of nonfiction, exploring many different ways of describing the same story, deciding on those elements which serve the story most effectively. Taking actual incidents your instructor has witnessed, there will be an in-class writing assignment called “the Story Generator.” We’ll expand upon obvious story choices in nonfiction, to create a wider palette of possibilities.
Finally, the overnight assignment will be in two parts: One, write a one or two sentence logline of a nonfiction project of your own. Two, you will have an exercise called the Motivation Generator, giving possible motivations for a historical incident you will be provided at the end of the session.

**TUESDAY: The Book Proposal**

After readings and critiques of project loglines and Motivation Generator exercises, we will spend the session on the above topic of the construction of the book proposal, as both a tool to sell your nonfiction work and a way to help you organize the construction and flow of the entire work, even before it is fully written.

As an in-class assignment, we will write the Overview section of a creative nonfiction project of your choosing. Readings and discussion of these Overviews will focus on clarity, construction and the colorful nature of the prose.

The overnight assignment will be an expansion and edit of the Overview section, begun in class, utilizing comments given in the day’s session.

**WEDNESDAY: Developing Your Own “Voice”**

After readings and critiques of the Overview, the day will be spent discussing Voice, emphasizing the difference between the author’s voice and the voice of a character. Samples of strong authorial voice in nonfiction will be read and discussed, with an eye toward encouraging the personality of the author to come out, to be memorable to readers.

As an in-class assignment to concretize the concept of the author’s voice, we will do an exercise entitled “The Author’s Voice Travelogue,” in which a nonfictional description of a location visited will be described with a strong, bold voice.

We will continue with readings and critiques of 2000-word excerpts. The overnight assignment will be an in-depth description, physical, intellectual and emotional, of a person you have known, in preparation for tomorrow’s work on Relationships.

**THURSDAY: Writing about Relationships and Locations, Home and Away**

We will read and discuss creative nonfiction writings about relationships and locations, from a variety of writers. And we will explore how the establishment of both Relationship and Location, early in a work, creates a strong momentum for the flow of the writing.

We will also discuss how to deepen the description of real-life characters, with the use of what I call the Character Template.

In-class writing assignment will address creating short essays on a particular first person relationship and on a location where a strongly dramatic or comedic situation has taken place.
The session will conclude with readings and critique of 2000-word excerpts and an overnight assignment, an essay based on your own personal history in an unusual location.

**FRIDAY: The Power of Images and the Senses/Marketing Your Work**

It is not just the responsibility of screenwriters to convey information and emotion with potent images. A discussion of The Power of Images and the Senses, including how Scale, Danger and Expectation can convey moments that live in the minds of readers of creative nonfiction.

In an effort to further engage the senses of readers of nonfiction, we will do an in-class exercise, “The Frozen Moment,” that takes an image from one’s life and imbues it with great sensory detail.

The marketing of your creative nonfiction will be the final emphasis of the class. This will include discussion on literary agents, magazines, online markets, lecture agents, and your responsibility for self-promotion via social media and other areas.

Finally, remaining 2000-word excerpts of nonfiction from participants will be read and critiqued, leaving room at the end for questions and answers related to the craft and business of writing.

**BRAD SCHREIBER** has worked as a writer in all media. He was Vice President of Storytech Literary Consulting, founded by Christopher Vogler, for 11 years. Brad created the series *North Mission Road*, which ran for six seasons on truTV, based on his book about the L.A. Coroner, *Death in Paradise*. His other books include the humor-writing how-to *What Are You Laughing At?*, which garnered blurbs from humor greats like Larry Gelbart, Tom Robbins and Mort Sahl. His compendium of live theatrical disasters, *Stop the Show!* was praised by Pulitzer Prize winning author Robert Olen Butler. Brad’s journalism for the *Huffington Post* has been honored by the National Press Foundation in Washington, D.C. and the L.A. Press Club. His national credits include *Variety* and *The Writer* and his fiction and nonfiction have been in literary journals *Tin House* and *Black Clock*. His newest book is the early-years biography *Becoming Jimi Hendrix*, called “fascinating” by the *New York Times*. The book was a Finalist, Biography, at the International Book Awards and was chosen for inclusion in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library. He administers the Mona Schreiber Prize for Humorous Fiction and Nonfiction at [www.bradschreiber.com](http://www.bradschreiber.com)

**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.