Section 6, Turning Your Life Experiences Into an Inspiring Book: Mystic, Mistress, Master

For mainstream/self-help/autobiographical & instructional/inspirational/memoirs/personal experience

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

June 13-17, 2016
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: Julie Tallard Johnson, MSW, LCSW, UW-Madison, julie@julietallardjohnson.com

We all have big stories to tell and some of us are called to share our personal stories, experiences and insights in a book. It is not complicated, as long as we don’t get lost in rules, details and other complexities. As an author of 10 inspirational books I can help you forge your own path to writing and completing a dynamic book that others will want to read. I have simplified a writing process for you so that when you go home you will have established a solid foundation of story, process and writing for your book (even if it is only in the idea stages when we start).

You will have the option to create a pithy book of wisdom based on your personal experiences and insights. In this class I will give you a simple format to create a smaller, concise version of your big idea and life experiences. Reach a wider audience with a book that is affordable, and an easy (transformative) read. Examples of such books’ successes include: Seth Godin’s book, Poke the Box, Steven Pressfield’s The War of Art and Brenda Ueland’s book, If You Want To Write: A Book about Art, Independence and Spirit. Your book (if you choose) can be self-published and later used as a launch for a more in-depth book. Or, you can do as I have and put together a pithy version of a larger scale book. For those

Please note: I offer this class in a circle, respecting that we are all masters and mistresses of our own stories and experiences. This puts us in a “tribe” of writers where I facilitate the process but we all participate by showing up. (There will be no expectations that you have to share. However, the more engaged you are, the more you are likely to get out of the process.)
“I cut the cord. I said, I will do only what I can do, express what I am—that’s why I used first person, why I wrote about myself,’ I Decide to write from the standpoint of my own experience, what I knew and felt. And that was my salvation.” –Henry Miller

Julie Tallard Johnson, MSW, LCSW, is an award-winning author of 10 nonfiction books, her first one published in 1989 through Doubleday (Hidden Victims: Hidden Healers: An Eight Stage Healing Process for Families of the Mentally Ill). She received the Independent Book award for Best Multicultural Book for Youth for The Thundering Years: Rituals and Sacred Wisdom for Teens and a Star Review in Publisher’s Weekly for Teen Psychic. Julie has also written numerous articles for local papers and online magazines. She sends out a popular weekly blog: ALL-WRITE Wednesdays: World Into Word. Julie enjoys working with aspiring writers and has helped many writers become authors.

Monday, Writing from the Zero Point

• Each day we begin with an overview of our evenings explorations and some sharing points.

• I will offer the basics of turning your profound and personal experiences and personal knowledge into a book. This first day includes an introduction to a couple of templates to use or borrow from in bringing together your ideas. You will choose and create your own template to work with by the end of the week. This will create a foundation and template for your book or book concept that you can rely upon. (I used a different template for each of my 11 books.)

• We begin with moving through a major point of resistance—Who are you to write this book? We begin to build the confidence and momentum in your writing. We will go over the Ten Methods of Writing From the Zero Point. These describe how to write masterfully from your own experience and knowledge.

We will practice the Ten Methods of Writing From the Zero Point throughout the week to further develop your theme(s), voice and structuring of your book.

• This process will introduce you to your book’s “voice”. (Or develop it more if you already have it). You will discover the storyteller’s voice and the voice of the “expert,” and how to weave those in together throughout your book. The expert voice is the voice of personal experience. You will also explore who your book is for – the general public or a special audience of readers.

To prepare for Monday:
Please read the handout: *Writing from the Zero Point* that I will send to you once you register for my class. Please choose one of the following books to start reading:

*The Zero Point Agreement: How To Be Who You Already Are.*  
http://www.amazon.com/Zero-Point-Agreement-How-Already/dp/1620551772/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=the+zero+point+agreement

*The War of Art: Winning the Inner Creative Battle* by Steven Pressfield;  
http://www.amazon.com/The-War-Art-Through-Creative/dp/1936891026/ref=cm_cr_pr_product_top

*A Rare and Precious Thing: The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Working with a Spiritual Teacher* by John Kain;  


*Poke the Box* by Seth Godin  
http://www.amazon.com/Poke-Hardcover-Seth-Godin%20Author/dp/B004Q5P596/ref=tmm_pap_title_0

*If You Want To Write* by Brenda Ueland  
http://www.amazon.com/If-You-Want-Write-Independence/dp/1604599286/ref=tmm_pap_title_0

**Overnight Explorations:** Write about “Who are you to write this book?” using the technique I introduced in class. Explore your motivation to write this book. Write a “Dear Reader” letter. Pull out one story within your over-all experience and write about it. Then, write a narrative on that story based on what I introduced in class. Begin your exploration into what template you will choose for your book.

**Tuesday, You Have Everything You Need**

- Each day we begin with an overview of our evenings explorations and some sharing points.

- Let’s begin! I will show you that you have everything you need to write your book. We will discuss how to come up with (or identify) a title, subtitle and a theme for your book (not set in concrete) but as a place to start.
• **Choose a Template for your Book.** This will be the core of the day’s lesson and guidance. There are a multitude of templates to choose from, and you will choose one that is uniquely yours. Steven Pressfield used the game of golf for his book Bagger Vance and, for his popular book, *The War of Art* he borrowed from the Chinese classic, *The Art of War*. I used the medicine wheel and Buddhist mandalas for my *Wheel of Initiation* book & basic principles of metaphysics for my *Zero Point Agreement* book. I will present several templates and invite you to consider one you could use to explore and develop your book’s ideas more deeply and to apply in the writing of your book.

**Overnight Explorations:** Research to find and choose your template and begin to use it in framing your book. This will take you to next level with your book. See how your experience or knowledge takes you, and the book takes the reader, on a hero’s journey, or through a medicine wheel for example. Or, discover how your book can be framed to the element of water or the game of golf. One woman framed her book on the myth and meaning of the rising Phoenix, another writer on running a marathon. My spiritual journaling book was framed on taking a spiritual pilgrimage through adolescence. You will find the perfect one for you and your book.

**Wednesday, The Mythical Journey of the Writer**

• Each day we begin with an overview of our evenings explorations and some sharing points.

• The mythical journey of the writer gives us the ability to create, discover and use personal and communal myths in our writing. We will borrow from two myths that I will present in the circle. I will give you the means to identify myths that are already present in your book, and to write or choose your own personal myth. You will become a mythmaker.

• Today we will discover how to use present day experiences and encounters for the writing of this and future books. Discover how all circumstances in your life can become material for your book(s). You will know the basics in using a field notebook to record ideas for your book. How your continued recording of stories and ideas feeds the book and keeps you in sync with your book, body and soul.

• Use of metaphor and symbolic language in your writing, with a deeper understanding of the meaning you are making with your book and asking the reader to make as well. These metaphors, along with the symbolic tone of your book, are yours to record and they come from your life. The magic here is that everything you need is within your reach. It is truly simple to write your own book. The metaphors and symbols are there in your life and story.
**Evening Explorations:** Find a myth that expresses and, in some way, represents your theme.

Explore a symbolic meaning in your book. (The “how to” was given in class).

Write about one encounter you had today. Then make note how this “encounter story” can be weaved into your book. What might be the symbolic or metaphorical meaning of this encounter? Collect this or other material in your field notebook.

**Thursday, Bringing it all Together – Exploring the shared theme of the Meaning Maker**

• Each day we begin with an overview of our evenings explorations and some sharing points.

• Today we will bring the myths and templates together for you to use in your book. We will see how your template (or borrow from one of the templates given out in class,) holds your theme and myth. This will be explored in the context of our shared writing circle. Each person will have time and attention focused on their book and its theme and template. I will have several exercises ready to use to help you and others develop their ideas further.

• I will go over additional basics of writing from personal experience—issues of privacy, using experiences that include others, ethical questions, and emotional concerns around sharing personal information with others. I will share about publishing options and what it is like working with an editor. You may want to start with a blog, and we can explore this too. This will include opening up to any questions you may have, such as, *do I wait till my father dies to share about the family?* It is likely that some of these questions will arise throughout the week. Trust that in my having written from personal experience (my first book, in 1989 was for families of the mentally ill and I have a brother with schizophrenia), and, professional experience of working with writers for over 20 years, I will have an answer.

***SPECIAL OFFERING:*** We will schedule a **SHARING CIRCLE** for this afternoon or evening. (This is an extra offering, no charge) Everyone is encouraged to come and share up to 4 pages of their writing. I will guide this sharing circle as a way to demonstrate “zero point sharing.” My zero point sharing circles are much like Parker J. Palmer’s Truth Circles, where we participate by listening deeply to each other free of feedback and suggestions.

**Evening Explorations:** Find a favorite poem, teaching story, myth, lyric, sutra, koan or quote to share tomorrow in circle. Write about what makes this
meaningful. Where or how might this go into your book? Or, how does it reflect the meaning of your book—journal about this.

Where are you concerned you might get stuck in your writing of this book? What would help you fulfill your dream of writing a book? Take the time to form this into one question or concern to present to me tomorrow in circle.

Friday, Coming full circle: Life as a Meaning Maker

• Each day we begin with an overview of our evenings explorations and some sharing points.

• We will explore the use of “third things” in our works such as through the use of poems, myths, quotes, lyrics, and koans as ways to express our points. We will focus on zero point methods 6, 7, 8 from the previous day, working with these in more depth.

• Having worked with you for a week, we will use an hour of making meaning together where I will give writing prompts in response to your questions. These prompts will serve as a way to keep the momentum going and to integrate this week’s material and explorations. The power of hearing other’s questions and my writing prompt is that you learn from other’s questions and use other’s writing prompts where they also serve you. (Have a question ready from last evening’s explorations).

* You will also gain methods of creating your own writing prompts to keep you writing to completion!

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.