NEW! Section 10: Narrative Nonfiction and Memoir—Bringing Truth to Light

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

June 17-21, 2019
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: Janine Latus

Think of a story you love. A story so compelling that even now, years later, you can recall how you were immersed in that world.

Do you know how to tell a story like that? Do you know how to find the details, the through-thread, the highs and lows? Can you craft dialogue, build narrative tension, play with words like a child coloring with crayons? Are your eyes and ears open to the stories all around you?

This is your opportunity to learn how to tell your own story and the stories of others with verve and joy. In this course we’ll toggle between unplugging our creativity and letting the words flow, and doing the harder, more structured work of dissecting why good writing works. We’ll learn how to read like a writer, analyzing how the author chose and arranged details in a way that pulled readers along. We’ll talk about pacing, sentence structure and cadence. We’ll write longhand to cues to warm our creative juices, and critique each other’s work in a supportive, encouraging environment.

Telling stories requires the same skills whether you’re writing your own story or someone else’s, so we will focus on the tools of good storytelling. We’ll talk about interviewing techniques that help you delve beyond the facade, but also about how to find facts in documents and photographs, and how to use those to add depth and importance to your piece. A powerful memoir tells us about an individual, but it also teaches us about a time and place, an era and set of values. Likewise, compelling nonfiction shifts in and out, from the specific to the universal and back again.

This class will cover the whole process, from gathering string to knitting a story, or from soup to nuts, if a food analogy is more appealing. We will cover each step of the process, from gathering information to crafting compelling final copy to finding an agent and getting a book contract.

Each student will be asked to bring in a current project, no more than 2,000 words, for workshopping during the week. Students will sign up for critique slots and provide their material
the afternoon before it’s their turn as center of attention. You will have the option of printing out your material and handing it out or emailing it to everyone in the class. Either way, expect it to come back marked up with good advice!

Each student also can sign up for afternoon office hours with Janine.

**About the teacher**

Janine Latus is an award-winning freelance journalist, with credits in *O*, the Oprah magazine, *Discover, Parents, Fitness, More, Woman’s Day, Family Circle*, and most of the major inflights. She is Vice President of the American Society of Journalists and Authors and a regular contributor to *Distinction*, a high-end lifestyle magazine based in Virginia, and to alumni magazines across the country. She also is the author of the international bestseller *If I Am Missing or Dead: A Sister’s Story of Love, Murder and Liberation*, which was on the bestseller lists for the *New York Times*, the *Sunday Times* of London and the *Toronto Globe & Mail* and has been translated into five languages, including Mandarin. She speaks around the world on the spectrum of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, for audiences as diverse as the United States Navy, a class of midwives in the Czech Republic, the World Bank, and YWCAs and Family Justice Centers. She wrote her book after her first time teaching at Write By The Lake. You can hear a speech on the book process that she gave at WBTL at [https://goo.gl/gL9no8](https://goo.gl/gL9no8) and read more about her at [http://www.janinelatus.com/](http://www.janinelatus.com/).

**Monday**

Introduction and clarifying the ground rules for critiquing.
Brief craft lecture on the perfect verb
Flash writing warm-up assignment with instant feedback
Discussion of an assigned 3rd person narrative nonfiction piece, dissecting why it works and why the writer chose specific details. Discussion of pacing, sentence structure, cadence. A deep dive into how to gather the details sprinkled into such stories, and how to choose which to use.
Suggested afternoon field trip into the community (even if the community is in the same building) to gather a story, whether of a place or a particular person. To be delivered by 6 p.m. via email.

**Tuesday**

Flash writing warm-up assignment with instant critiquing
Discussion of third person narrative nonfiction vs memoir
Reporting, whether for narrative nonfiction or memoir. How to get the details, whether through documents, photographs, interviewing, web research. Dissection of a story that presents facts that may have been hard to get.
Group critique of 2-3 students’ work.
Possible guest speaker on reporting long-form narrative nonfiction.

**Wednesday**
Brief craft lecture on the use of telling details.
Flash writing warm-up assignment with instant critique
Telling your own story with facts – finding them, ordering them, making them sing, figuring out the why to memoir – for whom are you writing and what are you trying to move in the world?
Group critique of 2-3 students’ work.

**Thursday**

Flash writing warm-up assignment with instant critique
Discussion about how well-written stories are structured, and how to find the structure for your own work.
Group critique of 2-3 students’ work.

**Friday**

Flash writing warm-up assignment with instant critique
The writing life – what does it take to succeed as a writer? Discussion of queries, book proposals, agents, the process. Intensive Q&A.
Group critique of 2-3 students’ work.
Closing remarks and wrap up

**Credit Option (credit fees extra):** 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.