

Members,

Now is the time. Let's commit to nudging BRW toward becoming a premier writers' organization. Every member, I believe, owns quality. Every member has voice.

We decided to embark on publishing 4 collections a year. "Poetry" came out early this month. Next is the memoir. Deadline is May 31. Length; please keep it to less than 4,000 words.

A memoir reflects on our past. That could be breakfast today. It could be an incident from our youth, or descriptions of characters who shaped our lives.

I would like this collection to be original work. I would like every participant to engage me in an email exchange of our thoughts regarding writing memories—limits, potentialities.

Please let me know within a few days. We are all writers. Let's push our organization forward. The following is advice to writers.

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Christi Craig <https://writeitsideways.com/telling-the-truth-in-memoir-more-than-just-facts/>

"Memoir is not an act of history but an act of memory, which is innately corrupt." ~ Mary Karr, author of *The Liars' Club*. *No witnesses to the same moment recall it the same. Conversations in memoirs are not transcriptions. They are approximations of intent.*

I don't plan on writing a memoir. My life may be busy and fulfilling, chaotic and frustrating at times, but I doubt I could compile my 42 years into a riveting 300 page book of Me. Still, there are certain stories my gut wants me to put down on paper.

Like the one about the summer I turned twenty-two, when I climbed into the back seat of a tiny Isuzu Trooper and rode all the way from Norman, Oklahoma to the Catskills of upstate New York. So much changed for me during that trip, change embodied in the green hills of Pennsylvania as they rose and fell alongside me like waves. I left in one state of mind and returned a totally different person: tan, nursed by the woods of Rhinebeck, New York. And, in love.

And another about how, the week after my mother died, I desperately clung to whatever artifacts of hers I could, from her Bible to that pair of gaudy glasses she wore in the late eighties. Those glasses sat out on a table at my house for months, maybe a year. Why did she keep them, and why couldn't I let them go?

As I begin to put some of these memories down into tiny essays, I realize more and more that memoir—in long form or in short—presents an ongoing challenge: that of telling the truth.

The Fact of the Matter

It isn't that I don't remember the details, or that I worry about who said exactly what. When it comes to memoir and memories, you "tell the stories as accurately and artfully as your abilities allow," as Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd say in *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction*. The Who, What, Where and When of a story shouldn't vary between two people, but the How or Why might unfold in entirely different ways.

After my road trip from Oklahoma to New York that summer, I flew home to visit my parents and discovered that their marriage was quickly falling apart. Or perhaps, after too many years of strain, the threads holding them together finally unraveled. Either way, in the months that followed, I found myself in the middle of their divorce. By choice, but also because I didn't know better. Certain events and conversations stick with me in uncomfortable ways, so I've tried to write about them. The facts are set down easily enough; it's everything in between—and the potential effects afterward—that present the hazards.

Emotional Consequences

“There is a ripple effect each time a memoir is published, and while the memoirist cannot fully prepare for it, he or she should expect it.” ~ Anthony D'Aries in *Writing Lessons: Memoir's Truth and Consequences*

The ripple effect, that's what I worry about. How can I write what I saw and heard and felt and avoid shedding negative light on someone I love? Do I need to write those stories? Even more important, must I share them?

I'm a writer. It's what I do, how I understand the world around me. And, I know I'm not alone in walking this tricky line when writing about personal experiences. So, I've been studying books, talking with other writers, and asking for critiques of my early drafts. Here are a few tips I've picked up so far:

First drafts are for your eyes only. Sometimes, I have to get through all the weird and uncomfortable and (what feels like) an inventory of wrong-doing before I get to a place of real understanding or peace about an event. First drafts offer a safe haven for such writing, because I'm the only one who will be reading the work at this point anyway.

Check your motives. Through each rewrite after that first draft, I ask myself, *Why am I writing this?* And, *who is the main focus in this story?* Never, ever, write for revenge. And, as Kidder and Todd in *Good Prose* say, “Be harder on yourself than you are on others. . . . You will not portray [them] just as they would like to be portrayed. But you can at least remember that the game is rigged: only you are playing voluntarily.”

Share the story with someone you trust. I've requested feedback from a family member as well as other writers on some of my recent work, asking if my story reads full of self-pity or too much criticism of another or less literary and more fit for my journal. When writing memoir, friends or family may be just as valuable as writing partners.

Let it go. After I've checked my motives and revised an essay time and again, after I've discussed it with someone else (and rewritten it one more time), then I have to let it go. Like D'Aries says, we cannot control what others think or how they see an event in comparison with the way we saw and understood it. But, if we're driven to put our stories on paper, and share them with others, then we have to be ready to face every consequence—good and bad.