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Best Christmas Gift Ever – Your 'Tiny Memoir'

By Daphne Larkin



Memoir Writing students gather with instructor Daphne Larkin (center) for their “Memoir Reading at the Library” earlier this month. Pictured left to right in the front row are Bob Hayward, Kathryn Danahy, Gena Hawk and Shirley Hallblade. In the center row are Francis Bradburn, Dr. Barbra McCune, Daphne Larkin and Teresa Adkins with “Ruby.” In the back row are Angie Hathaway and Joanne Green.

One of the most valued presents you can give your family, your children, your grandchildren and generations to come – not to mention to yourself – is your memoir. But writing a conventional book-length memoir takes time and since you don’t have much of that before Christmas, why not give a “Tiny Memoir”? It’s fun to do, you can write it in a few hours and it is something your family will cherish long after the holidays are over.

WHAT IS A TINY MEMOIR?

A Tiny Memoir is a true short story told in first person about a transformative experience that had an emotional impact. As an example in my Tiny Memoir I wrote about the triumph of love over loss, how falling in love with the compassionate man I would marry helped me heal from the death of my young son.

Subjects for a Tiny Memoir are limitless. You could write about a life-changing event, a turning point, an important relationship, a trip that made a difference, an experience that shaped you (such as caregiving, mentoring, the Pandemic), a small moment that revealed a bigger truth, an interaction that inspired you, and – illustrated by a memory – something that gives your life meaning.

The Tiny Memoir concept has been around a while and has also been called the Mini Memoir or the Flash Memoir. It can be as short as 100 words, however, I've found that 750 words is a good amount because it's enough to say just about anything – if you stick to your subject.

My memoir writing students in Transylvania County essentially write three Tiny Memoirs of 750 words throughout the eight-week class. Earlier this month the class read their stories during a “Memoir Reading” at the Library. If you were in the audience, you were privy to some extraordinary Tiny Memoirs but in case you missed the event, here are several examples.

Bob Hayward wrote of his love of trains from the time he was a boy. He described the many pleasures of sharing train trips with his family including trips on the East Coast Champion from Florida to New York, the Rocky Mountaineer Train through the Canadian Rockies and the White Pass Summit Railway Excursion in Alaska. The title of his piece – “The Wayward Haywards Stay on Track” – set the theme for his story.

Another student, Angie Hathaway, read “Gone Gray,” in which she described getting gray hair at 27. She took us on her journey trying to “hide” her gray hair by coloring it until one day – after several pivotal encounters – she realized she didn't need to hide her gray hair anymore. Her story ended in a scene with her 4-year-old daughter who said she wanted gray hair to which Hathaway responded that she might get that chance because gray hair ran in the family, but either way her hair would be beautiful whether she chose to go gray or not.

Frances Bradburn read “The Briefcase,” a deftly told story that unfolded at a leisurely pace about a long-ago professional friendship with a colleague. But it was his left-behind briefcase in her car that brought these two together. We learned this in the very last sentence when she told us that after he came to get it, she made him dinner, “...the first of over 31 years of feeding him daily.”

So now that you've written your Tiny Memoir, how do you gift it? One idea is to read it to your family and friends while sipping mulled wine on Christmas Eve or enjoying a Christmas Dinner. But what if you want to give it as a present, how do you wrap two or three typed pages? It's easy. Buy a colored folder from an office supply or craft store, put your Tiny Memoir inside it and on the front of the folder write “My Tiny Memoir,” the name of your story and your name as the author. Then, enfold it with Christmas wrapping paper or colorful fabric such as velvet, satin or silk, and tie it up with a beautiful bow. Now you're ready to give the best Christmas present ever – the gift of story, your story, the gift of your Tiny Memoir.

Daphne Larkin is an award-winning book author, columnist and magazine writer who teaches Memoir Writing at the Transylvania County Library and the Blue Ridge Community College. Her next class will be at the library in 2024 from March 25 to May 13, and will meet on Monday from 3 to 5 p.m. For questions, email Daphne Larkin at daphne@daphnelarkin.com.