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Five Reasons to Make Writing a Memoir a New Year's Resolution

Daphne Larkin For The T. Times



Daphne Larkin (far left) and her Memoir Writing Class at Blue Ridge Community College toast the end of class and the beginning of a New Year.



Michael Yates pours Terere, the Paraguayan tea, for the Memoir Writing Class as Daphne Larkin looks on.

One of the best ways to look forward to the New Year is to look backward. To remember. To recall what has past. The big moments, the small moments, the happy ones, the sad ones, the meaningful moments that have made you who you are. When you remember those moments and write about them, you are transported to the future where you can find clarity and meaning in your life. This is one of the many reasons why you might want to make writing your memoir a New Year's Resolution and here are five more. The best news is that none of them involve losing weight or exercising. Hello New Year!

EMBRACE YOUR LIFE When you write about your journey on the planet, you identify the themes, come to terms with your hardships, are grateful for your blessings, note what you've accomplished and realize what's still left to do. By understanding what shaped you, who you are and all that brought you to today, you find meaning in your life. Perhaps the memoirist and novelist Sue Monk Kidd said it best when she wrote, "Writing memoir is, in some ways, a work of wholeness."

PRESERVE YOUR LEGACY As you look to 2023 and reflect on your past, you may feel the urgency to record family stories that will be lost forever once you are gone. If my mother hadn't written the story about my great grandparents traveling with their young family in a covered wagon in 1899 from Central Florida to Naples, before taking a sloop to the Ten Thousand Islands where they homesteaded Fakahatchee Key, I

would never have known my family's history or gained insight into where my adventuresome streak might have come from. Writing your memoir is one of the best gifts you can leave your descendants.

AN IMPORTANT EXPERIENCE Everyone has had life-changing moments. For my memoir writing student Michael Yates, his was in the late 1970s in a poor rural community in eastern Paraguay, where he conducted research for a PhD in anthropology.

“Writing about the two years my wife and I lived there gave me the opportunity to reflect more deeply on our experience and the important ways it helped shape our lives,” he said. “We owe much to those people and I hope by recording and preserving a clear sense of how they lived that we might help repay their kindness to us.”

GET HEALTHIER Studies have shown that writing about your life boosts mood, reduces stress, keeps memory sharp and improves immune function. Even Harvard University has endorsed the health benefits of memoir writing. Indeed, writing memoir can be a panacea for many ills for when you write about an experience – whether it's a funny or difficult one – you gain insight into your past and feel better. After all, as the novelist William Faulkner noted, “The past is never dead. It's not even the past.”

MAKE 2023 MORE MEANINGFUL When you write about your past, you become more aware of yourself, your world and the people in it. It's a life-altering, rich process which makes you more present, more alive. A good way to begin is to take a memoir writing class for it is there that you will join a small group of people of all ages and from all walks of life who are dedicated to sharing their most intimate stories. To be part of such a group is simply an extraordinarily deep and rewarding experience. Witnessing my students at the Blue Ridge Community College embrace each other's stories as if they were their own has been an honor and a privilege. And every one of them leaves changed. As the memoirist Mary Karr wrote in her book, “The Art of Memoir,” “None of us can ever know the value of our lives, or how our separate and silent scribbling may add to the amenity of the world, if only by how radically it changes us, one by one.”

As we look to the New Year we begin to take stock, to initiate necessary changes and to embark on new beginnings, and writing about our lives is one of the best ways to do that. Our memories matter and need to be recorded and shared. Writing about them strengthens our sense of identity and purpose, helps us heal our traumas, enables us to understand better who we are and broadens our relationships. If you have a story itching to be told, a story that won't leave you alone, then you must make writing your memoir a New Year's Resolution.

An award-winning book author, columnist and magazine writer, Daphne Larkin will be teaching memoir writing at the Transylvania County Library (Adult Programming) in April and May of 2023 and at the Blue Ridge Community College on the Brevard campus in June and July. For more information, contact Daphne Larkin at daphne@daphnelarkin.com.