

THE Transylvania TIMES

Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Consider 7 Winning Subjects When Writing Your Memoir

By Daphne Larkin



The Memoir Writing class participants get ready to read their work to the public with their instructor, Daphne Larkin (far right).

Many of us have had an experience so meaningful, so extraordinary, and so life-changing that we want to write it down for ourselves, our family and friends, and others who might benefit. Happily, today, memoir writing is within the reach of everyone, not just celebrities and professional writers.

Here in Transylvania and Hendersonville counties, many of my memoir writing students who began writing short stories have become so engaged with their subject they are now working on book-length memoirs.

If you are thinking of writing about your life, check out these seven subjects which your neighbors, and my students, are writing about.

COMING OF AGE

“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in,” novelist Graham Greene wrote.

For Brevard resident Richard Mills, that moment arrived when his family moved from Indiana to a Quaker (Friends) Mission in Kenya in 1955. He was eight years old. For the next 10 years, Mills attended strict Christian boarding schools. Often returning to his home mission, he would then hunt, fish and play with African friends, visit wildlife parks and participate in famine relief with his family. His working title is “Growing Up in East Africa.”

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

In the late ‘70s, Dr. Michael Yates of Cedar Mountain spent two years with his bride in eastern Paraguay where he did field work with poor rural farmers for a doctorate in anthropology. While the military dictatorship created difficulties, experiencing daily life with the farmers made up for it. His working title is “Paraguay-Bound: Two Suitcases and Hope.”

Transylvania County’s Dr. Barbra McCune served as a medical missionary for eight years in Honduras, where she provided medical care in a rural clinic which lacked running water, lived through the chaos of a coup, and met and married an Episcopal priest. Her working title is “Medicine, Mission and Marriage: A Honduran Memoir.”

HARD STORY

Heeding Winston Churchill’s famous quote, “Don’t let a good crisis go to waste,” Marilyn Martin of Hendersonville is writing about growing up a devout minister’s daughter, marrying a minister, and then falling in love with a woman in their congregation. Ostracized and excommunicated from the church, she has lived to tell the story which is a powerful and timely one. Her working title is “Unfaithful.”

JOURNEY

At 21 years old, Angie Hathaway, originally from Mississippi and now residing in Brevard, was just beginning to figure out what kind of woman she wanted to be when her mother died. Lost in grief, Hathaway grappled with the deep South’s ideals of womanhood. As she tiptoed, then sprinted into her future self, Hathaway stepped on both hellish and hilarious land mines, made course corrections and finally, with the birth of her daughter, claimed her authentic womanhood. Her working title is “Mama’s Dead... Now What?”

Etowah’s Judith Bliss, a lifelong Labrador lover, takes the reader with her as she embarks on the emotional journey of accepting that as she ages, downsizing is not just about her home. Her working title is “The Last Lab.”

FAMILY

Growing up in a small French Cajun town in Southeast Louisiana, Dr. Christy Bauman of Pisgah Forest examines the cultural and relational dynamics between her wealthy plantation family and the “help.” As she becomes aware of her family’s multi-generational racism, she rejects it, gives up her “blood money” inheritance, and creates her own family and a new life in a new town. Her working title is “Plantation, Inc.”

SPIRITUAL QUEST

Cedar Mountain’s Dr. Mike Rowland is writing about the spiritual journey which led him to become a doctor. His working title is “A Life Filled with Challenges, Opportunities, Some Potholes, but Ultimately Lots of Happiness.”

HYBRID

Among those creating new ways of writing memoir, Wendy H. Gill of Brevard has embarked on writing a collection of 100 standalone essays, poems and short prose, each accompanied by family photographs. The stories carry such titles as “Prom Mom” and “Why is Grandpa Howard Dressed Like a Girl?” Her working title is “Family History Project.”

JOIN THE FUN

All of you, dear people of Transylvania County, have stories waiting to be told, so why not join in the fun of your neighbors and give memoir writing a shot? Once you begin, the magic, the mystery and the thrall of remembering your life will consume you and bring you pleasure and happiness. What could be better than that?

Daphne Larkin is an award-winning book author, columnist and magazine writer who teaches “Memoir Writing” at the Transylvania County Library. Her next class will be held on Mondays, 3 to 5 p.m., from March 25 through May 13. On March 21, Larkin will be the featured speaker at the Transylvania Community Arts Council’s Open Mic Evening. For more information, contact her at daphne@daphnelarkin.com.