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WANT “BIG MAGIC” IN YOUR LIFE? WRITE A MEMOIR!

By Daphne Larkin



Angie Hathaway (left) and Daphne Larkin discuss David Kessler’s book “Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief.” Hathaway says, “My mother died young and memoir writing has given her back to me, to my family, to my children. She will live on through my words.”

My spring memoir writing class this year took off like a rocket. Within the first hour, 10 perfect strangers were sharing their life stories so animatedly that you might have thought we were in a neighborhood bar, not the sedate Transylvania County Library.

As the weeks went on and the class progressed, the students got livelier and louder in a good way. Soon, the librarians who passed by began quietly closing the door to our classroom. Everyone was so engrossed in the stories of their classmates we barely noticed.

I've been teaching memoir writing for three years so I knew what was happening, but I'd not seen it this early on in the class. Quite simply, those ten students had caught the fire of memoir writing.

The thrill I'm talking about is discovering a new way of being in the world through the stories you tell about your time on the planet. It's like starting over, for you are the narrator and this is your story. In a way, you begin again and your life shifts. Suddenly, you are on your own rocket ship reliving the grand adventure of your life.

As you travel into your past, you will become so deeply immersed in memoir-writing that you may feel energized, exhilarated and even electrified. The memoirist Elizabeth Gilbert calls this experiencing "big magic" in her 2015 book by that name. When you embrace a creative project, she says you will find yourself squarely in the middle of "creative living," and once you're there, "big magic" begins to move in full throttle.

Local memoir writers Michael Yates, Angie Hathaway and Frances Bradburn have all experienced this "big magic" at play.

Michael Yates is writing a memoir about his doctoral research of poor rural farmers in Paraguay in the 1970s. For him, the "big magic" was the realization that his story was more than a story about his work, but "something of a love story, with my marriage to Barbara nurtured to strength in the remote Paraguayan countryside." Only now as he writes decades later, does he truly appreciate "how fierce her love and support have always been." As a new bride, she ventured with him for two years into the unknowns of rural Paraguay where "we lived with

swollen ankles from walking miles on rough roads, got trails of bedbug bites after sleeping in rural homes and faced security concerns from a military dictatorship suspicious of anyone working with the rural poor."

Angie Hathaway says working on her memoir "invited me to heal from the early death of my mother, to claim my blunders and to create space in my life for new opportunities. What I did not expect was all the healing and courage and joy I would find as I wrote."

Frances Bradburn, who is writing vignettes about stories of her family growing up in Brevard, said, "The more I write, the more I remember. As I continue, I find that I explore more deeply and honestly. It is a gift I have given myself."

A gift to myself! Healing, courage and joy! A love story realized and regained! And so much more. Sound appealing? Are those things you'd like to experience? Here's what I promise will happen once you board a rocket ship to your past. As you get your story down, you will feel an increasing sense of well-being and empowerment that will shift things for you, big time.

One day you'll realize it is the remembering and the writing itself that have created a space for you to see things differently and to live more vibrantly. Then, as if the Greek god Zeus suddenly sent a lightning bolt illuminating all that came before, you'll know taking that "big magic" ride across the decades of your life has made all the difference.

Daphne Larkin is an award-winning book author, columnist and magazine writer. Her next memoir writing class will be held at the Transylvania County Library on Thursdays from 3 to 5 p.m. beginning Sept. 26 through Nov. 14. For more information, contact Larkin at daphne@daphnelarkin.com.