

## Writing Your Family History

Tuesday and Thursday, 9am - noon July 17, 19, 24, 26

NPL, Conference R0om IA

Instructor: Dr. Angela Sutton, Angela.C.Sutton@Vanderbilt.edu

**Course Description:** Every family has a history and every writer has thought about ways to capture this important information. All families have secrets, anecdotes, and ways in which, large and small, they have helped to shape the trajectory of history. In this writing workshop, students will discover how their family's story is part of a larger national or global story, and how to use creative nonfiction writing skills to make it interesting for a larger audience.

Dear Students,

I am incredibly excited to walk with you through the journey of giving your memories focus and form. In this creative nonfiction writing workshop, we'll each be working on our own short piece to help us explore some facet of our family histories, however you choose to define that term. We will use readings, discussions, lectures, writing exercises, and workshopping to learn the fundamentals of creative nonfiction writing and help each other create the very best pieces we can.

This class is divided into four sessions, and by the end of this course, you will each have completed a draft of part of your family history.

- **Session 1, July 17: Introduction to Creative Nonfiction:** We will explore the different types of creative nonfiction writing and decide which type is best for the kind of story you want to tell.

**Readings:** "Like Mexicans" by Gary Soto, "Autobiographical Notes" by James Baldwin, and "Total Eclipse" by Annie Dillard

- **Session 2, July 19: Writing Techniques and Tips:** We will discover how to apply the tools of fiction writing to your pieces to make them interesting and topical.

**Readings:** "Don't Flinch" by Jack Smith, and "Telling a True Story," by Philip Gerard

- **Session 3, July 24: The Craft of Nonfiction:** we will learn to refine our writing by focusing on the core elements: characterization, dialogue, and plot

**Reading:** "Driving Mr. Albert" by James Paterniti

- **Session 4, July 26: Critique and Refinement:** we will learn how to both offer constructive feedback to one another, as well as how to benefit from the feedback of others.

**Readings:** “How To Give Constructive Criticism” by Marcy McKay (<http://positivewriter.com/how-to-give-constructive-writing-criticism-that-actually-helps/>), “How To Give and Receive Constructive Feedback as a Writer,” by Kimberly Coyle (<https://thewritelife.com/tips-for-writing-critique/>)

Please note that with exception of Session 4, all of the readings are in the form of PDFs provided to you on the OLLI website. Feel free to print them out and bring them to class, or bring them in electronic form on your laptops, tablets, or phones. Please complete each of the readings before you come to class that day so that you can get the maximum benefit from the discussion.

Each student should bring a notepad and pen and/or a word processor for in-class writing. You may use whichever is more comfortable for you, but may find that pen and paper helps the creative process works better, so give yourself that option if possible for you.

There will be time for both short writing exercises, and for working on your longer piece in class, but you should expect to do a small amount of writing outside of class as well. There will be multiple opportunities to read your work out loud, but this will be strictly voluntary. At no time should you feel obligated to share your writing with the whole class. However, on the last day, we will be workshoping our longer pieces in smaller groups. Please be prepared to bring 4 copies of your work, and for 4 others to read it.

As each class is 3 hours long, we will be taking a break near the mid-point of each class. However, if you need to leave for any reason outside of this time, please feel free to excuse yourself at any time.

I look forward to meeting you all at Session 1!

All best,

Angela