

recovery process which has therapeutic value. (I will include articles on this aspect in week 5.)

## Writing In Manageable Chunks

It's a daunting task to write a book or try to bring piles of dates, photos, letters and documents to life. There are many people with partially completed projects, even several half written books! I know a few. The idea is to write about your life or family history in easily manageable chunks or sections. One section will equal one period or event you want to address. If you write in small sections, later then you can edit them, take out what is too personal, add more, and easily rearrange it into any format that works for you.

The purpose of this course is to get you started, give you some ideas and let you be creative. We are working on the process, not just the final product. The idea is to enjoy writing and discover new approaches that inspire you.

One cautionary note. This is also to be a positive course. I don't want you to dredge up painful memories which are going to make you feel sad, or may take you back into a trauma you have been through. The emphasis throughout will be to look at the positive aspects of your life and your loved one's life. If you want to write about negative incidents, you are welcome too, as long as it doesn't open old wounds which are best left untouched. If your story will definitely open up wounds, please read Week 5 now.

The writing approach that I take is to get you to write in a personal journal before you finalise what will go into your family story or your own life story. Think of it like a messy first draft, full of bits and pieces that are seemingly unrelated. When you



have it all down, then you can step back, look at what you have collected, and decide how you want to put it all together. You can do it chronologically, or by order of the most important events in your life and their significance. You can do it by themes, ages, historical events, individual milestones, short pieces to accompany photos or documents, people who have played key roles, whatever you like.

Feel free to also include photos, letters, newspaper clippings, poetry, print outs of relevant web pages, song lyrics; whatever you desire that expresses your thoughts, feelings and will provoke memories. Adding in research on towns, culture, natural disasters, or world or local events that occurred during the periods of time you are covering, will also enliven and enhance your work.



### **Commitment Sheet Exercise**

As it has been said, if you write down your goals, you are much more likely to achieve them. A commitment sheet will keep you on track as far as what you want to do, though it can be changed if your vision expands.

I'd like you to download and fill out the Commitment sheet, which can be found on the course menu page under Unit One.

The file is available as a .doc you can type into, or a .pdf

You do not need to submit this as an assignment.

## **On Writing Memoir and Capturing Characters**

By Inkspot guest lecturer Michelle Richmond

"One of the wonderful things about writing memoir is that there is so much life material to use when we allow ourselves to fully

explore our pasts. Much of that material comes from character. This is beginning to sound easy, isn't it?

Not so fast. Because the characters who make up our memoirs



are part of our lives, and because we know them so well, it's easy to skimp on characterization as we write our stories. We may expect the reader to find the person interesting because he or she is interesting to us, yet we don't allow the reader to get to know the character in the way

that we know him or her. It's easy to take character traits for granted, leaving the reader in the dark.

Remember that your readers know nothing about any of these people until you tell them. Therefore you must be absolutely vigilant in thinking about, and presenting, all the real people you write about - including yourself - as characters, first and foremost. Remember, every good story is character-driven.

In his memoir, "A Childhood," Harry Crews introduces us to characters who seem more like the stuff of imagination than of reality. Notice Crews's description of Hollis Toomey and his wife:

"His wife always wore her hair tightly bunned at the back of her head under a stiffly starched white bonnet. Her dresses were nearly to her ankles, and they always looked and smelled as if they had just come off the clothesline after a long day in the sun.

Hollis always smelled like his pockets were full of ripe chicken guts, and his overalls were stiff as metal. He didn't wear a beard; he wore a stubble. The stubble was coal black despite the fact he was over sixty, and it always seemed to be the same length, the length where you've got to shave or start telling everybody you're growing a beard. Hollis Toomey did neither...A mosquito couldn't fly through a door he was standing in he was so wide and high, and more, he was obviously indestructible. He ran on his own time, went where he needed to go."



If you think fiction writers have all the fun,

think again. Your own life is populated with people who will make wonderful characters if you take the time and care to render them accurately.

You don't need to elaborate on every detail of character in the story. However, you do need to know enough that you can choose what to include and what to omit; and the reader needs to know enough for the character's actions to seem believable. 'But this really happened!' is a weak defence of a character's actions if the character is so vague that the reader doubts the veracity of the story."

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## Reading On Journaling

- [http://www.rightmindlogic.com/why\\_and\\_how.htm](http://www.rightmindlogic.com/why_and_how.htm)
- <http://42explore.com/journl.htm>
- Writing the Journey: <http://www.writingthejourney.com/>
- <http://www.storyhelp.com> This site belongs to a very well known author, Tristine Rainer. Tristine has written some excellent books on journal and autobiography writing and throughout this course, you will find relevant quotes from her. Tristine's two best known books are 'The New Diary' and 'Your Life As Story: Writing The New Autobiography.'

Her books do not normally appear in Australian shops, however, if you are interested, you may be able to find them through your library, or order them through a major chain such Dymocks or Angus and Robertson. You could also try Amazon, the online bookshop at <http://www.amazon.com>