Introduction to Creative Nonfiction

Stanford Continuing Studies CNF03
Peter Kline
Office Hours: By appointment

General Information:

Course Objectives
Creative nonfiction is one of the most exciting and swiftly expanding genres of creative writing. In creative nonfiction, writers can unite elements of factual reporting and journalism with the imaginative reach and narrative power of fiction writing, story-telling, and even poetry. This course will serve as an introduction to a variety of approaches to creative essay writing, including personal narrative, portrait, and lyric essay. The course will also emphasize prose style, allowing students to explore their narrative voice through lively in-class writing exercises and structured out-of-class assignments. Each student will submit writing for class consideration in a supportive workshop setting, and will learn from some of the best authors of contemporary nonfiction, including Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, Tom Wolfe, and David Foster Wallace. Students will emerge from the course with a substantial body of new material, a sense of the myriad possibilities of creative nonfiction, and a better understanding of the life and practices of a writer.

Course Grading
You have three options:
1.) No Grade Requested (this is the default option)
2.) If you elect to Credit/No Credit, attendance will determine your grade
3.) If you elect to obtain a letter grade, your final portfolio will account for 100% of your grade.

Workshop
The idea of the workshop-based class is to help students learn to revise their own writing and to give constructive feedback about the writing of others. Students up for workshop should submit their writing with one copy for the instructor and a copy for each of the workshop participants. Students should also provide written feedback each week on the writing of other students being workshopped.

Final Portfolio
Each student seeking credit in the course will compile a portfolio of 2 significant revisions of essays written during the course of the semester. The final portfolio will be due in class on June 4th.

Week 1
Introduction and review of syllabus.
George Orwell: "Politics and the English Language" (581)

Week 2
Lars Eighner: "On Dumpster Diving" (19)
George Orwell: "Shooting an Elephant" (472)
Henry Louis Gates, Jr.: “In the Kitchen” (170)

Week 3  **Essay #1 Due** – Identity/Personal Narrative
*Workshop First/Last Paragraphs*
Nancy Mairs: "On Being a Cripple" (28)
David Foster Wallace: “The View from Mrs. Thompson’s” (handout)

Week 4  *Workshop First/Last Paragraphs*
Joan Didion: "On Going Home" (1)
David Guterson: "Enclosed, Encyclopedic, Endured…” (102)
Annie Dillard: from “An American Childhood” (70)

Week 5  **Essay #2 Due** – Portrait
*Workshop First/Last Paragraphs*
Scott Russell Sanders: "Under the Influence" (121)
Tom Wolfe: “Yeager” (handout)

Week 6  **Group A Workshopped**
Edward Abbey: "The Serpents of Paradise" (623)
“Zen Parables” (660)
Peggy Shumaker, “Moving Water, Tucson” (handout)
Michael Martone: “Contributor’s Note” (handout)

Week 7  **Group B Workshopped**
Jane Smiley: “Belly, Dancing, Belly, Aching, Belly, Breasts” (138)
Ambrose Bierce: from “The Devil’s Dictionary” (278)
Virginia Woolf: “The Death of the Moth” (644)
Kathleen Dean Moore: “Muskgrass Chara” (handout)

Week 8  **Essay #3 Due** – Lyric Essay
Ian Frazier: “Take the F” (96)
Brian Doyle: “Joyas Voladoras” (291)
Dinty W. Moore: “Son of Mr. Green Jeans” (handout)

Week 9  **Group C Workshopped**
Garrison Keillor: “How to Write a Letter,” “Postcards” (253)
Terry Tempest Williams: “The Clan of One-Breasted Women” (666)
Verlyn Klinbenborg: “January” (handout)

Week 10  **Group D Workshopped**
Maxine Hong Kinston: “Tongue-Tied” (237)
Langston Hughes: “Salvation” (620)
Naomi Shihab Nye: “Someone I Love” (handout)