Course Title: From Catharsis to Craft: A Memoir Workshop  
Course Code: CNF 88  
Instructor: Monica Wesolowska

Course Summary:

While you may experience catharsis while writing memoir for yourself, this course will take you further as you learn to create a cathartic reading experience for others.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.

Note About Live Attendance and Recording:

Students are expected to attend live Zoom sessions. Because of the intimate nature of working with memoir, class sessions will not be recorded except in rare instances.

Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)  
  o This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)  
  o Students must attend at least eight of ten sessions.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)  
  o Students must attend at last eight of ten sessions, turn in weekly brief exercises, and participate in the workshop of final manuscripts. (Final MS is 1,500-3,000 words and can be an excerpt.)

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week One/September 21/Memory and Catharsis  
We will start by getting to know each other, talking about memory, anxiety, and the role of catharsis in writing memoir. A writing exercise based on Jo Ann Beard’s Boys of My Youth will help you generate early memories and patterns. For next week, read handouts of memoir excerpts and start a private journal for daily writing practice.

Week Two/September 28/Trauma and Style  
How does experience affect the style and form of a memoir? We will look at a variety of memoir excerpts dealing with traumatic memories, specifically looking at the way
authors create their “narrators.” In class writing and lecture. For next week, read Chapter 1 of Trevor Noah’s *Born a Crime* and continue working on writing exercises.

**Week Three/October 5/Plot and Context**
How do you plot a life? What is the “beginning” of your story? This week, we will start working with plot and how to deepen your story with a larger context. Discussion of Noah’s *Born a Crime* excerpt. For next week, more journal exercises. Read excerpts from Sarah Broom’s *Yellow House* and Andrew X. Pham’s *Catfish and Mandala*.

**Week Four/October 12/ Setting and Characters**
So you have a narrator and a sense of plot. Where will you set your story and how will you populate it? Learn how setting and character choices can help with theme. Discussion and writing exercises based on *Yellow House* and *Catfish and Mandala*. For next week, read handout of excerpts, and start focusing on your final MSS.

**Week Five/October 19/Point of View**
While most memoirs are written in first person, there are other possibilities. We will discuss handouts of excerpts from memoirs with unusual points of view and do an exercise to help you access your own stories from new points of view. For next week, finish your final MSS. Read *Model Citizen*, by Joshua Mohr and come with questions.

**Week Six/October 26/Guest Author**
FINAL MSS DUE TODAY. We will cover some ground rules for giving productive feedback in our next three weeks of workshops. We will also discuss the whole memoir, *Model Citizen*, by Joshua Mohr. After our discussion, we will be joined by the author himself for a Q & A about the process of writing his book.

**Week Seven/November 2/Workshop**
For the next three weeks, we will be reading and discussing your MSS in workshop.

**Week Eight/November 9/Workshop**

**Week Nine/November 16/Workshop**

**No Class/November 23/ Thanksgiving Break**

**Week Ten/November 30/Where To Go From Here**
Now that you’ve written a draft, and received editorial feedback, what do you do with that feedback? In this final class, we will talk about the process of revision, the world of publication, and how to keep your creative well from running dry.

*Please Note*: This is a preliminary syllabus, subject to minor revision. Handouts and links to readings will be available on Canvas the Friday before your course starts.