

Course Title: Memory to Memoir: Crafting Compelling Stories from Difficult Experiences

Course Code: CNF 79

Instructor Name and Bio: Daniel Barban Levin is the author of *Slonim Woods 9*, a 2021 memoir from Crown about his experience joining and escaping a cult. He received an MFA in poetry from UC Irvine. He is the recipient of the Lipkin Prize for Poetry and the Lynn Garnier Memorial Award, and his writing has appeared in Provincetown Arts, Bat City Review, Sarah Lawrence Review, The Westchester Review, Offbeat, and The Fourth River.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Thursdays, 6:30 - 9:20 pm (PT)

Meeting location: Zoom (details will be shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)

The class sessions will be recorded. Live participation will be especially valuable in order to get the full benefit of the course. Recordings will be available should students need to miss a week due to other conflicts.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, demonstration, and practice time for students
 - Requires interaction and active participation
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Required discussions in Canvas
 - Students will submit workshop pieces
 - Instructor will provide feedback on assignments
- Individual conferences available by request

Course Summary

No prior knowledge or experience is required to benefit from this course—only a desire to express oneself in writing, an enthusiasm and openness to learning new techniques, and a love of reading.

We will embrace Ocean Vuong’s notion that “the process is the project”—in the course you will work towards producing a number of standalone pieces or chapters of

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a larger project, and additionally one hopes that the experience of finding a shape and expression for your experiences will be in itself enriching.

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

Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
 - 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)
 - Students must attend and/or watch at least 7 of the 9 class sessions
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
 - Students must attend and/or watch at least 7 class sessions and complete a final piece of writing composed of multiple essays or chapters developed over the course of the 9 weeks.

**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.*

Textbooks/Required Materials

Required

Lynda Barry, “What It Is”
Joe Brainard, “I Remember”
D.J. Waldie, “Holy land”
Dani Shapiro, “Inheritance”

Recommended

Dave Eggers, “A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius”
Claudia Rankine, “Citizen”
Maggie Nelson, “The Argonauts”
Anne Boyer, “The Undying”
Eula Biss, “Having and Being Had”
Saidiya Hartman, “Lose Your Mother”
Mary Karr, “The Art of Memoir”

First Assignment

Read Lynda Barry’s “What It Is”

Write a short letter (1 - 2 pages) telling me your relationship to writing and, as best you can, what you are hoping to gain from this course.

Tentative Weekly Outline

Week 1

Imagination and Memory

Reading: Lynda Barry, Dani Shapiro

Writing exercise: Early memory reconstruction

Week 2

Finding a Form

Reading: Joe Brainard

Writing: Memory list

Week 3

The Voice and Vantage of the Rememberer

Reading: Dave Eggers, Anne Boyer

Writing: Writing your prologue / finding your voice

Week 4

Place, History, Context, Artifactuality

Reading: D.J. Waldie, Eula Biss, and Saidiya Hartman

Writing: Gathering artifacts / First draft of piece #1

Week 5

The Emotional Throughline

Reading: Claudia Rankine, Maggie Nelson

Instructor Feedback

Writing: Revise first draft of piece #1

Week 6

What is "True?"

Reading: Mary Karr, Joan Didion, Tara Westover, Robert Coles

Peer Feedback

Week 7

The Observant Eye/I

Reading: Bruce Chatwin, W.G. Sebald

Peer/Instructor Feedback

Associative/observational writing exercise

Week 8

Climax and Crisis

Reading: Maggie Nelson, Dani Shapiro

Writing: Draft piece #2

Week 9

Revision, Pitching, and Publishing

Writing: Revise existing works and draft final piece with accompanying pitch materials