CREATIVE NON-FICTION III:  
THE TURNING POINT  

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Creative Writing Program  
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Required Texts:  
The Beautiful Unseen: Variations on Fog and Forgetting by Kyle Boelte  

Good Prose: The Art of Non-Fiction by Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd  

A COMMENT ON OUR REQUIRED TEXTS:  
Occasionally students have already read the assigned book(s), which is fantastic. If that’s the case (and if you feel competent enough to discuss a book you read in the past with your cohort), I’m happy to help you pick a different book that will inspire continued work on your individual project. I’m also happy to help you pick a different book if reading a biography or other genre specific NF book would help you with your project.  

SUPPLEMENTAL READING:  
In addition to the required texts (listed above), I’ll occasionally post links to essays on the web that will help round out our discussions. These are optional, but I hope you’ll read them too.  

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:  
Because this course is focused on book writing and is the continuation of other courses you may have taken at Stanford, we will begin workshopping larger pieces of writing right away. Beginning in Week 3, student volunteers will submit to 25 pages of work (12 point font, double spaced). Submissions can be shorter than 25 pages, but not longer.  

Each student will have the opportunity to submit work two times during the quarter, for an opportunity to workshop 50 pages of new work.  

Students will share their work in small groups and receive critiques from me and other students. As a student, you can expect to read and comment on one long submission per week; this is in addition to required reading and your personal writing. I will read and comment on all submissions.  

There will be no structured weekly writing exercises, though if desired I will create a space for sharing work that is in ‘draft’ form. I won’t comment on this work but will save my energies for moderating discussions and reading longer submissions.
WEEKLY “HOMEWORK.”

*Provide thoughtful written critique to the work of your classmates.

*Use the information gleaned from this experience (our readings, lectures, conversations, critiques, etc.) to propel your personal work forward.

*Read and engage in forum discussions focused on required reading.

My hope is that this structure will provide the ideal writing experience: You’ll have support from fellow writers who know your work, weekly does of inspiration, compelling conversations about craft, and an intrinsic desire to focus on your personal work. Should that desire lag, don’t worry! There’s a committed group here to cheer you on.

TYPICAL WEEKLY SCHEDULE:
Each week, you’ll log onto Canvas and read the “Lecture and Lesson” page. This will include my art/craft/process thoughts to start the week, as well as both writing and reading assignments, any optional materials or links, and other announcements. These lectures are important and help guide both our group discussions and focus your personal work. Please read them!

FRIDAY: All the materials for the coming week (lectures, discussion questions, etc.) will be posted on Friday morning BEFORE the week begins. (For example, the content for Week 2 will be posted at the end of Week 1). This way you can start your work for the following week over the weekend if you choose. FRIDAY is also the day that you will post your long submissions. This allows for weekend reading and rumination.

WEDNESDAY: Comments on student submissions due. Please post comments to your small group.

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY: Post your responses to the readings and discussion questions, respond to the work of your peers, ask any questions you have. Please post any questions about assignments, readings, or course content on the Forum for everyone to see, rather than sending it by email. There is a “Questions and Comments” thread so that you can ask questions or discuss ideas that don’t fit anywhere else. You’ll have my response by Friday afternoon to any work posted that week.

WEEKENDS: Here is a chance for you to get ahead on the week’s work if you wish to post exercises or responses to discussion questions for the following week.

I encourage you to post your own comments and participate in class discussions at any time during the week. I’ll moderate our discussions, but urge you to remain active even when I am not present -- I’d like us to have a vibrant and active on-line class environment. Also, it’s worth noting that all deadlines are flexible, though if you sign up for a workshop date please mark it in your calendar and aim to meet it!
TO REITERATE: If you have a question about course content or assignments, please post it in the forum so that all may see both your question and my response. There are no silly queries and it’s likely that you classmates will be curious about the answer to your question too. If you have a private question or concern, please contact me directly. The best way to contact me is through the Canvas messaging system, but you can also email me at zimmerman_anne@yahoo.com

TRUST & CONFIDENTIALITY: Writing workshops are built on trust. I think this is even truer in online workshops where we’re not all sitting together in the same room. To build this trust, it’s important that we all agree that the work you present here stays within the workshop. If you love someone’s piece and want to share it with your husband/wife/best friend/etc., ask the writer first. Chances are, she (or he) will be thrilled and give you the go ahead. But please first get permission.

POSTING AND SHARING YOUR WORK:
As a reader, workshopping involves a careful reading of the piece and the posting of a letter of response to the writer (See Critique Guidelines below).

Workshop submissions are due on the Friday before we read your work. Post your writing in the Forum thread I’ve labeled with your name. Workshop pieces may be up to 25 pages in length (8,000 words). Pages should be double spaced, typed pages in 12 point font. Please aim to submit a thoughtful critique to your classmates work as soon as possible so that we may have rich discussion and Q+A before moving into a new week.

If a student participates fully in the course, they will have written and received instructor and student feedback on the equivalent of 50 pages of their book-in-progress.

ONE FINAL NOTE:
Although many students take online courses with the absolute best intentions of doing every last little assignment, I’ve never taught a course into which the real life—work, illness, children, the illness of children, etc. did not intrude. When this happens, I counsel a less is more approach: do what you can, when you can, rather than dropping out in frustration over not completing every assignment. Nothing terrible will happen if you miss a week of reading or don’t hand in an assignment. As long as you hand in a full-length piece and participate fully in the workshops of your classmates, you’ll be fine. Even if you have to take a couple of weeks completely away from the class, you can always come back. We’ll welcome you.

CRITIQUE GUIDELINES:
As a student in this intensive course, you are expected to read your fellow students work closely and write each author a detailed critique (of a paragraph or more), identifying the strengths of the writing and what could be strengthened further in revision. They will do the same for you. These responses will be posted for all to read.

By editing and responding to other students’ writing, you’ll learn how to bring the same critical eye to bear upon your own work. Because writing is challenging, it’s important to
recognize what’s working well in a draft. This is why I encourage workshop members to start by commenting upon the strengths of a piece, what you loved, and what’s especially original and compelling before offering constructive responses to elements that might need further consideration. The tone of these critiques should always be supportive and respectful, and should move well past a simple “I thought this was really good.” This feedback should help guide your classmates in their revision. As we all know, the goal of a writing course is to provide a safe and stimulating space in which people can take creative risks and grow as writers -- let’s work together to make our time together as productive as possible.

*Please note:* A commitment to the value of sharing and receiving feedback on work is essential to this course. If you’d like to receive thoughtful comments on your own work, you’re expected to make comments on others’ submissions. If you fail to do this, I will contact you privately and you may lose the opportunity to post submissions for others to read.

**MY RESPONSES:**
I will post my own critiques of your writing in the forum, alongside the critiques you receive from your workshop group members. In a traditional classroom setting, I would offer much of my feedback aloud, as part of the whole class’s instruction. In our online class, I make my comments public with the same hope that they will be interesting and instructive not just to the author of the piece but to the rest of the class as well. If, however, you submit a piece of writing about which you feel particularly vulnerable, you may request to receive your comments privately (over email) and I’ll be happy to accommodate you.

**WEB CHATS:**
In weeks 3, 6 & 9 (more frequently if there’s interest) I’ll host a video “chat” session. This session is an online office hour of sorts, but in a group context. Attendance is optional—you’re all busy people, with very different schedules and responsibilities. This is an opportunity to gather in a group and mimic the give-and-take you’d find in a traditional classroom. We’ll discuss the readings, answer one another’s questions in regard to writing techniques, and kvetch.

**GRADING:**
For those of you who are taking this course for a letter grade, the breakdown is as follows. Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting (Friday of the last week of class) by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.

To Receive an ‘A’ in this class: All of the weekly assignments along with two long submissions were completed and submitted on time. You made insightful contributions to most discussions and provided constructive, thoughtful comments to the work posted by your peers.
To Receive a ‘B’ in this class: Most the five weekly assignments along with your two long submissions were completed and submitted on time. You made active and insightful contributions to many discussions and provided constructive, thoughtful comments to the work posted by your peers.

To Receive a ‘C’ in this class: Some of the five weekly assignments along with one long submission were completed and submitted on time. You occasionally made and insightful contributions to discussions and provided some constructive, thoughtful comments to the work posted by your peers.

As you can see, I expect students to take part regularly in the online forum—to discuss published work and to provide feedback to your classmates on their works in progress. This course functions only when everyone takes part in the writing and responding process.

WHAT TO EXPECT, WEEK BY WEEK:

**WEEK 1: Welcome!**
Reading: Selections from *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Introductions, summary of current work, goals.
Workshop sign-up

**WEEK 2: What Is Great Writing?**
Reading: Selections from *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Revisiting scene, summary, commentary.
Workshop sign-up

**WEEK 3: Bird By Bird**
Reading: *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Plotting and outlining your book.
Begin Workshop

**WEEK 4: Writing Complicated Stories**
Reading: *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Writing about people, using dialogue, quotes and research.
Workshop

**WEEK 5: The Turning Point**
Reading: *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Where are my turning points? How do I write them well?
Workshop

**WEEK 6: The Messy Middle**
Reading *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Narrative and the emotional outline
Workshop

**WEEK 7: Hitting the Right Notes**
Reading: *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Studying voice and rhythm.
Workshop

**WEEK 8: Considering the Ending**
Reading: *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Getting to there from here.
Workshop

**WEEK 9: Fake it till you Make It**
Reading: *The Beautiful Unseen* and *Good Prose*
Staying motivated to write and revise.
Workshop

**WEEK 10: Certificate of Mastery**
Wrap up; further goals for writing and books