Course Title: I Laughed So Hard I Cried: Writing Comedy and Tragedy
Course Code: EGL 43 W
Instructor: Rachel Smith

Course Summary:
No theme is so human, said Henry James, as “the close connexion of bliss and bale.” In this course we’ll try our hands at writing both of these great human themes with an emphasis on the connections between them. In order to develop our own craft, we’ll study the workings of successful published writing. We’ll address the uses of scene and summary—the two main building blocks at your disposal for crafting a piece of finished writing—as well as character, surprise, timing, newness, story, and more. You’ll complete short exercises in various genres (memoir, fiction, poetry, etc.) and write two longer pieces of work in the genre of your choice. In addition to work by renowned writers including Lydia Davis, George Saunders, and Nick Flynn, we’ll consider several “Moth” stories, and you’ll have the opportunity to write your own story, which you may pitch to that series or to another outlet, as one of the two longer pieces you’ll compose during our ten-week class. Finally, each student will present the class with a short piece of published writing (a story, poem, essay, comic, short film, etc.) that brought him or her to tears or laughter. These pieces, contributed by you, will enrich and expand our schedule of planned readings. The writing you do for this class will be read by your peers and the instructor and collectively we will try to identify what’s working, what’s not, and how each piece can best succeed on its own terms. This is an online course. For more information about the Online Writing Program, visit continuingstudies.stanford.edu

*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)
  - Score will be determined by student attendance and participation. Credit is given at 70% completion of requirements.

- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Written work, as assigned by the instructor, will determine a student’s grade.
  - If you choose to receive a grade for this course, it will be calculated as follows. More than two absences from video meetings will affect your grade. 30% Completion of two pieces of writing (up to 3000 words)
  - 30% Responses to your peers’ writing

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
20% Completion of writing exercises
20% Overall participation

*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.

Required Texts and Materials:
- *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, Nick Flynn
- Various stories, essays, etc., available for free online or for purchase through SIPX (Stanford’s copyright clearance system).
- A notebook that you dedicate to this course

Participation & Workshop:
Although this course takes place online, we’ll be engaging in “discussion” throughout the quarter, and responding to one another’s work. The quality of our collective experience depends on your engagement. This is true for our examination of published work as well as responses to your peers’ writings. You’ll get the most out of this class if you read all the assigned writings carefully and read them twice—especially the work submitted by your classmates.

Tentative Weekly Outline:

**Week One**
*Character & Story*
Exercise: American Gothic and people you know
Readings: Two “Moth” stories; *Another Bullshit night in Suck City*, Nick Flynn

**Week Two**
*Scene & Summary*
Exercise: Write it both ways
Reading: *Another Bullshit night in Suck City*, Nick Flynn

**Week Three**
*The familiar and the new*
Exercise: Epistolary

**Week Four**
“Moth” Story (or Piece #1) Due, Group 1

**Week Five**
“Moth” Story (or Piece #1) Due, Group 2
Week Six
“Moth” Story (or Piece #1) Due, Group 3

Week Seven
Timing & Surprise
Exercise: Standing in the question
Readings: “Happiest Moment,” Lydia Davis; TBA

Week Eight
Piece #2 Due, Group 1

Week Nine
Piece #2 Due, Group 2

Week Ten
Piece #2 Due, Group 3