



NAMW Newsletter Issue #22 | July 2009



That is happiness; to be dissolved into something completely great.
-- Willa Cather

Welcome to all writers and new members

Summer time at NAMW is as busy as the "school" year with five workshops, including several free ones. Workshop students have been telling us how much they are enjoying the workshops given by Jerry Waxler and Sharon Lippincott. We are so pleased that they are sharing their expertise in the field of memoir writing with us in so many ways--workshops, book reviews, and even audios. Jerry's classes have received rave reviews, and the students in Sharon's class are excitedly learning about how to make their stories sparkle. We enjoyed having a huge number of guests for the FREE workshop, and we are planning another one soon.

On July 28, Jerry Waxler will talk about how reading memoirs can help you write your own--a way for us to become more conscious of how we can learn from the stories that we are reading. [click link](#) For me, that includes fiction, too. Every time I read a new book, I learn something new about structure, language, and how to create a seamless world through words.

My Writing Spiritual Autobiography/Healing Memoir workshops are inspiring and

NAMW WORKSHOP SCHEDULES:

[\[July 28, 2009\] Free Workshop with Jerry Waxler at NAMW Workshop Title: Read memoirs to help you write yours](#)

[\[August 4 - August 25, 2009\] Memoir Writing Workshop with Jerry Waxler, M.S.: Structuring Your Memoir: The Beginning, Middle, and End](#)

NAMW TELESEMINAR CALENDAR:

[\[August 7, 2009\] Jordan Rosenfeld: Make a Scene: Learn to master the miracle tool of good fiction writing for your memoir](#)

[\[September 11, 2009\] NAMW teleseminar featuring Becky Levine: Writing the Truth](#)

amazing. We enter the path of the stories that we need/want to tell, and follow the threads through dark forests and into green meadows. Every week I am transformed by hearing the transformational stories that the students write! I listen to stories of dark nights of the soul, and also hear about the mysteries and magic in life. We talk about everything from childhood and parents, to the ecstasies and adventures with pets, mountains, trees, books, moon rise, and grandchildren.

Coming up for members in August: a forum where you can all connect, share resources, and get more acquainted. We are creating this forum because of popular requests to create an easier way for members to talk with each other besides the café. There will be more new benefits for members coming up too, so stay tuned.

Be brave, keep writing your stories. We change the world through stories.

Myth and the Journey of the Hero (ine) in Writing: The Journey of Transformation

Linda Joy Myers

Joseph Campbell has much to say about the myth of the hero and the journey of the hero/heroine. As we write our memoir, we begin a journey, and we are the hero/heroine of our story. If we are writing fiction, we are on the mythic path as we search for the character's journey and the challenges s/he must face to make a good story. The first step on the hero's journey is to be called: you feel like you want to write, but competing voices slow you down or stop you. In the mythic journey, the hero is tempted to refuse the call, but someone comes forward to persuade her to continue. Perhaps you want to write your memoir, but are worried about family reactions, writing skills, and having enough time.

When the heroine takes up the call, she changes costumes and takes on a new identity. For the writer, this may mean that she sets up her computer and cleans off her desk. She may want to have a certain cup of tea ready, or flowers and photographs that inspire her to write. Rituals are an important part of committed action.

Maureen Murdock in her book *The Heroine's Journey* writes about the female hero's journey, a 9 stage process that entails at first rejecting feminine values, making it in the man's world, experiencing spiritual death, and finally turning inward to reclaim the power and spirit of the feminine. There are many good books about the hero's journey in writing--including Chris Vogler's *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure*. It also helps to read some fairy tales. Even those made into movies by Disney have a classic structure, but it's even better to read the original tales. You can find them on the internet and compare the different versions of the fairy tales as they evolved over time.

The Journey

Fearsome tasks are undertaken on the journey and the heroine must summon courage. A wizard or magic figures become helpers on the journey, which always leads through a dark forest or an uncertain, dangerous terrain. The hero must face death, the symbolic death of the ego, before the story is finished. The hero must face something greatly feared or dangerous, that's capable of killing him. When we write our truths, we feel that we have entered some kind of dark forest where we encounter powerful emotions, such as fear or anger at how our lives were lived, and we hesitate to go forward. "Why do I have to do this, I don't want to." We may stop writing.

Yet the urge to write and explore through writing becomes strong enough to push the writer/seeker onward if she is to succeed at her task. The helper/wizard figures on this journey are the writing group, writing mentors, and authors that inspire the writer to write anyway!

As the journey continues, the heroine finds a deeper part of herself that she was unaware of, and resolutions to her story that were unexpected. As in the myths and fairy tales, she brings home the new knowledge gained and starts a new life, transformed by the journey.

There is altruism in a mythic story. The hero is fighting not only for himself but for his community and often for love. When we write our stories and publish them, we offer them to the larger world as a guiding light for their path, just as we have been guided and supported by the creativity of others. We share our knowledge of the process, and in so doing, we broaden our lives and enjoy the support that comes back to us.

Spiritual and creative mentors all agree that there is no other path to transformation but the journey through the dark forest, a mythic story that resounds even today, as people enter into dark challenges in their lives. They emerge with a new understanding and insights that otherwise would not be gained whether through financial challenges, illness, or relationships.

Your writing journey is mythic, especially if you are drawn to it despite your fears or doubts. Begin today with 15 minutes at your journal or the computer. The rewards you will find are many, but yet unknown, to be revealed as you write, as you commit to your writing journey.

Exercises:

- Write a story about yourself as the hero/heroine in mythic form starting with "Once upon a time."
- Write a hero/heroine story about your mother, father, or another person whose story you imagine.
- Write about the heroes and heroines you've known in your life. Who are they? Why are they important to you?
- What fearsome journey have you undertaken? Start with, "When I got up that day, I never suspected that..."
- What was the "dark woods" in your life? "The worst part of that time was..."

- Who are the mentors, wizards, or guides on your journey?
- What have you learned on your journey? "My life was never the same after..."

Iranian in America makes love and laughter by Jerry Waxler

When two countries go to war, their "us" versus "them" mentality make their differences seem irreconcilable. So when I saw Firoozeh Dumas' memoir, "Funny in Farsi, Growing up Iranian in America" it appealed to me instantly. I wanted to laugh at the differences instead of fight over them. But how can you laugh about something so serious as the differences between Americans and Iranians?

At a meeting of the National Speakers Association in Philadelphia, after an introduction that repeatedly cracked up the audience, Ron Culberson explained that humor happens when your mind sets you up to expect one thing, and then the punch line suddenly shifts the ground you thought you were standing on. That's what creates the laughter in "Funny in Farsi." One culture sets up an expectation, and the other culture spins that expectation in a surprising direction.

Firoozeh came to the United States from Iran when she was seven, with a father who believed America was the promised land, a land of infinite wisdom, compassion, and possibilities. That's a familiar theme for me. Three of my four grandparents moved across the globe from Russia to the melting pot of America. In the early days of their immigration, there was enormous suspicion against them. Their Jewish names and manner and their foreign accents isolated them. But the melting pot blurred the differences especially among the children, and by the second or third generation, the accents were gone, the suspicion eased, and people started to relate to each other as people. The self-effacing humor of Jewish immigrants was an important tool as they struggled to become part of their new home, and helped create a sense of bonding and strength. [Read More](#)

[July 28, 2009] Free Workshop with Jerry Waxler at NAMW: Read memoirs to help you write yours



Date: Tuesday, July 28, 2009

Times: 3 PM PDT | 4 PM MDT | 5 PM CDT | 6 PM EDT

Aspiring memoir writers excavate decades of memories: old images, half-remembered characters, miseries, and joys. How do you translate these fragmentary experiences into the unified experience of a book?

One place to look for guidance is the book shelf. See

how other writers have integrated all these aspects of life into a story. In this FREE 45 minute teleconference, Jerry Waxler will offer insights to help you read like a writer, based on his blog about reading and writing memoirs, <http://www.memorywritersnetwork.com/blog> »[Read more](#)

[August 4 - August 25, 2009] Memoir Writing Workshop with Jerry Waxler, M.S.: Structuring Your Memoir: The Beginning, Middle, and End

Schedule: 4 Tuesdays | August 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2009
Times: 5 PM PDT | 6 PM MDT | 7 PM CDT | 8 PM EDT
Registration fee: \$115.00 | [Click here to enroll](#)

Early sign-up discount.

Sign up before August 1

and pay only \$99.99.

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[enrollment.](#)

You already have ideas about what you want to include in your story. You've identified many of the facts and scenes. Now, you need to put it all together so it reads well from beginning to end. In this workshop, Jerry Waxler will help combine your material, vignettes, and ideas into a story. He will discuss the three parts of a story-Beginning, Middle, and End. Then the class will explore ways to weave these parts together in their own stories. [Read More](#)

To register, [click here](#) or you can email the NAMW Customer Care at info@namw.org.