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September 2009 Newsletter | Issue #24

Back to School: Now is the Time to Focus on Your Story

Hi, this is Linda Joy, the President of the National Association of Memoir Writers. I'd like to welcome new subscribers to our newsletter and all our new members this month!

We have a lot of events and new workshops lined up at NAMW that will be helpful to the development of your skills as writers, memoirists, or personal historians.

Sharon Lippincott is still planning on offering her

[workshop on dialogue that was delayed](#)

due to a Big Bug that got her this week. Most memoirists feel intimidated by dialogue, but Sharon's workshop makes it easy to deal with. She has terrific exercises and some great ideas how to make it something you can learn to enjoy writing that will enliven your stories.

Be sure to scroll all the way to the bottom of the newsletter to get a taste of Sharon's class in her article, "Five Tips for Writing Dynamic Dialogue."

We enjoyed having Jerry Waxler teach for us this summer, and he got excellent reviews on all his classes. Jerry will be teaching again with us soon.

Starting in October, we have the

[free preview workshop by Kim Pearson](#)

that I'm really excited about. I've always been very interested in history and how history intersects with our personal lives. I found Kim on Facebook, and we got acquainted through posts and emails. Her book is amazing, with the timelines of eight categories of events that have impacted our lives over the last several decades. She will also teach a wonderful

[6 week workshop about how to draw upon history to give your memoir context and texture](#)

. We are all part of history, and we help to create it!

Be sure to add

[your story in history](#)

to our website—we created a special place where you can add your own special

moments in history.



It's "Back to School" week here at NAMW, and we are celebrating by listing the workshop offerings that we are rolling out for fall. I love to learn, and taking classes has always been a deep pleasure of mine. Being encouraged to stretch my knowledge base and to develop new resources has always been stimulating and exciting to me, and I am pleased that NAMW can address some of the needs that memoirists have by offering interesting and useful workshops, teleseminars, and eventually discussions through our forum. We had hoped to open the new forum to our members this month, but due to typhoons, family illness in my assistant Sam's family, and other technical challenges, we are delayed for now, but it is coming! But the good news is that we are having a

[Back to School Sale](#)

on our memberships. Join between September 11th and September 18th and save \$20 off the cost of an annual membership to the National Association of Memoir Writer's!

[Visit our site to learn more!](#)

Upcoming Events

September 11, 2009: Free for NAMW Members

[Critiquing Memoir: Being Professional with the Personal](#) by Becky Levine

September 17, 2009: Free Workshop Preview

[Your Memoir and History—What Part Did You Play in 1984?](#) with Kim Pearson and Linda Joy Myers

September 22, 2009: Limited Space Available

[How to Write Dynamic Dialogue](#) with Sharon Lippincott, NAMW Advisory Board

September 21, 2009:

[Advanced Writing a Healing Memoir Workshop](#) with Linda Joy Myers, NAMW President

September 26, 2009:

[Saturday Berkley Workshop--Writing your Healing Memoir and Spiritual Autobiography](#) with Linda Joy Myers, NAMW President

September 28, 2009:

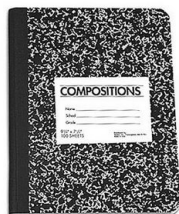
[Monday Online Workshop--Writing your Healing Memoir/Spiritual Autobiography](#) with Linda Joy Myers, NAMW President

October 1, 2009:New Class!

[Playing Your Part on the World Stage: How Your Memoir Intersects with History](#) by Kim Pearson

October 16, 2009:Free for NAMW Members

[Writing Nonfiction in November: Styles of Nonfiction Writing](#) by Nina Amir



Back to School Days

Now my family and I have a new ritual: my daughter and I walk my grandson Miles to school on the first day, joining the bustling crowds of children, parents, and alert teachers. Now he's an old hand at school, whereas last year it was all new to him. He knows exactly what to do: hang up his coat and his backpack, find his seat, pay attention to the teacher, and get ready for story time. I wanted to sit down with him on the floor and listen to a story! Lucky Miles. The aroma of classrooms, the paper, paste, chalkboard and easels reminded me of Adams Grade School when I was growing up. I don't think things have changed much.

Many of us still love shopping for school supplies. The aroma of notebooks and

books, pens and pencils, erasers and chalk is alive in my memory banks. The sensual experience of school was inseparable from the sound of chalk scratching across the board, the rustle of petticoats and scraping of shoes. And then there was the delicious way the world opened up through books, maps, and painting.

I always loved gathering pens, pencils, and paper, and even now I enjoy buying them, feeling a little like a first grader. I wish I could walk back into a Woolworth's the five and dime, as it was called to buy a Big Chief thick pad of paper, don't you? Today I went into Staples, but it was slick, impersonal, and not nearly as much fun as buying paper and pencils in the same place where you could find a pretty bracelet or rose scented soap. But still, as I pried open a new set of pens, I felt smart and ready for school, or for writing. Enjoy your school shopping, and be sure to capture some of those memories. Tell your children or grandchildren what it was like for you--just leave out the "walking five miles in the snow" part! Open your new notebook with all its blank pages, and begin!



Writing Exercises: Musings About Your School Days and Writing Life

- * What smells, sounds, and rituals are in your memory bank about starting school in September?
- * Write about what you did to prepare for the first days of school and your feelings about school.
- * What teachers do you still remember, and why. How did they change your life; what did they contribute?
- * School can be a mixture of positive and negative experiences. What was the best thing about school for you? The worst?

Write scenes about these topics--with dialogue, smells, sounds, and action. Put yourself into the scene again as a child, getting into your own skin and seeing through your young eyes.

Linda's Writing to Heal Workshops

As many of you know, I offer workshops on Writing as Healing in various forms—from writing a spiritual autobiography to writing a healing memoir—often these streams cross and intersect—so I'm pleased to continue the advanced workshops that began last year. I'm offering a free workshop as well to answer questions people might have about how memoir writing can be healing. However, it's important to know that writing to heal does not mean that one can't write a publishable memoir. As the memoir develops into a readable and enjoyable work, the skill level builds and the story becomes even better and even more healing too. Writing a memoir is a process, not just a goal.

Over the Labor Day weekend, I joined the women writers that have been part of the Writing to Heal workshop that has been writing together for a year. We met in Oceanside to get more acquainted—though much had been revealed through a year's worth of stories, and we enjoyed great gourmet meals, much talk and sharing, and we did two workshops together to develop writing skills. All in all, a great time in a wonderful place! Look for photos and videos on <http://www.NAMW.org> soon.



Five Tips for Writing Dynamic Dialogue

by Sharon Lippincott

NAMW Advisory Board

You can't beat dialogue for breathing life into characters. Letting them express their own views with their unique speech habits makes them believable. It pulls readers in and involves them in the story.

Most writers know this, but many shy away from dialogue. They may believe the myth that you have to be born with a gift or "ear" for it. Others are uncertain about the technicalities, or simply timid about trying something new.

The myth is not true. Dialogue is a skill, and although it does come more naturally to some than others, it can be learned and mastered. The first step is to study the basics. The second is to practice. Keep those fingers moving. The following five tips on writing dynamic dialogue will help you hone this skill.

1. Write like people talk. Spend a lot of time eavesdropping, listening not to content, but to the way ideas are expressed. Immerse yourself in rhythm, local idioms, patterns of interruption and other quirky things. If you are writing memoir,

take time to replay mental tapes of the person you plan to write about. Once you get a fix on the sound of their voice, their words will flow from your fingers. Write it just like they'd say it.

2. Tidy up the mess. Every day speech is full of litter words: uhms, uhrs, well, so... and similar noise. People begin sentences and stop halfway through. They interrupt and finish sentences for each other. Leave in just enough of this messiness to keep the dialogue pliable, but prune most of it to give focus and shape to the passage.

3. Make dialogue do double duty. Beginners are inclined to find a spot where they can drop in a few lines of dialogue to meet some imagined quota. While it's true that one main benefit of dialogue is to break up long passages of narrative, that's not a sufficient reason to include it, and it's likely to sound stiff and contrived. Make sure dialogue meets at least one of these criteria:

- * It moves the plot along by conveying information, building suspense, or setting a mood.
- * It develops characters by showing them in action and allowing them to speak for themselves rather than telling about them.
- * It reveals motivation. Readers would far rather hear characters explain themselves, explicitly or by their behavior, than read your explanation of motives.
- * It streamlines information. A few words of dialogue can sometimes replace a full page of narrative.

4. Use precision in tag wording. Dialogue tags describe who is speaking and/or the speaker's behavior. Use the tag words "said" and "asked" sparingly. With a little thought and a good thesaurus, you can find well over one hundred words that can express a combination of state of mind and behavior with precision, adding value to the dialogue.

5. Keep things in balance. Dialogue adds life and vigor to stories, but too much dialogue makes them read like screen plays. There is no magic ratio and some stories call for more than others. Use your judgement and ask discerning friends or writing partners for an opinion if you aren't sure.

Follow these rules, and with a little practice, your characters will leap right off the page.

I hope you all are enjoying the changing of the seasons. Keep writing! If you have any questions, or would like to suggest a workshop topic please let us know. Email us at: info@namw.org.

Warm regards,
Linda Joy Myers
National Association of Memoir Writers
Be Brave. Write Your Story.

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