

Seeds of Life, Seeds of Memoir

by Linda Joy Myers

"... I tell you the white hydrangeas
turn rust and go soon.
Already mid September a line of brown runs
over them.
One sunset after another tracks the faces, the
petals.
Waiting, they look over the fence for what
way they go."
—Carl Sandburg

It is full summer now. We associate summer with many different things—Fourth of July celebrations, picnics, swimming, heat, gardens, and cookouts. In many places there are summer rains, warm and fragrant, and the pulsating power of the heat. During most of my childhood I would be in Iowa by July, where the heat was not as oppressive as at home. Oklahoma was the home of the tornado, thick black storms rushing down from the Rockies, and the wonderful throb of cicadas.

In Iowa I remember the luscious bushes of perfectly round flowers in deep blue, pink, and white all around the big old houses where I'd visit relatives, sixty years older than I was, white haired, bent over, and full of interesting stories. I could see the wisdom in their eyes, and the bitterness for some. It was hard to visit old people in nursing homes, and know that once they had been young like me.

I'd look at the hydrangeas, reassured that life was still flowering. Then I'd join my great-grandmother Blanche in the garden while she tilled the soil, and told me the stories of her life, dating back to pioneer times. These simple moments of everyday life shaped me into who I am, and give me material for poems, stories, and my memoir.

When we write, we draw from so many different aspects of our life for our fiction or memoir stories. Sometimes we find treasures of memory that didn't seem important at the time. It pays to search our memory banks where we find the seeds that drive our writing passion, our stories, and the deepest roots of who we are. It is a rich experience to travel back in memory, seeking those gems, then put the pen to paper.

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Writing Tips: The Path of Memoir Writing

Memoir writing is about finding the story, digging, reflecting, and pondering. It is also about writing what comes up, wandering through story ideas and story lines, not knowing where we are going. We find nuggets along the way.

Turning points

- * Sometimes we have stood at a crossroads, wondering what path to take. Robert Frost talks about taking the road less traveled. What were five or ten major turning points in your formation as a person?
- * How did you change in response to these events? Write this in some detail—the before and after story.
- * Who are you now as a result?
- * Or have you left those traits behind and gathered others in your path of self-development—more turning points to add to your list.

Consciousness

Memoir is also about exploring the contents of our psyches—especially our conscious and unconscious motivation as we have journeyed through life. Stream of consciousness writing is a powerful practice: do a period of writing without censoring anything that flows from your pen. Poetry and brief sketches are other ways to track the inner, deeper part of the story.

- * How did the events and people that you write about influence the choices you made in life on a deeper level—your philosophy of life, decisions you made such as: "I'll always..." and "I'll never..."
- * A way to track the inner, unconscious story is to write about a dream, or to just free write.
- * Write a prayer or wish.

These murky memories and parts of yourself can be approached from the dark side as well with such questions as:

- * How would you change your fate if you could change one thing that happened in your life?
- * What did you wish for that didn't turn out the way you wanted?
- * What decisions along your path would you do differently now that you are older and know what you know?
- * What did you learn about these choices that you might not have learned otherwise?