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Writing Flash Memoir: Memories Fade but Memoirs Last Forever

- What is Flash?
 - Flash is a quick, short, showy, burst of a true story.
 - Usually a flash story is defined as 300-1000 words. I like to target 500.
 - Why? Because less than 500 is almost too short to develop a story. Anything over 500 can start to drag. So, 500 is my magic number.
- What is Memoir:
 - Memoir is a collection of memories from one finite point on a timeline to another. It is not comprehensive; it is a slice of a life.
- What is Flash Memoir?
 - It is a slice of a slice of life.
 - Think of life as a pie. A Memoir is one slice of pie. A Flash Memoir is a sliver. This sliver should be tasty—full of flavor, savory, rich, and extraordinary. It should feel worthy and satisfying. It can offer a moral, be uplifting, and poignant. It is worth your audience’s time.
 - I put mine on a blog. Eventually, I would love to collect them all, put them in chronological order, and develop a true memoir called Crazy Mom. (Not because I’m crazy, but because my life has been a crazy. I’ve had ups and I’ve had downs. I’ve handled some of them well, and others, well, not so much.)

- My audience seems to enjoy crying with me, laughing with me, and, frankly, laughing at me—and of course, I join in because, how can I not. When something absurd happens, sometimes laughing is the only way to survive.
- How does Flash Memoir differ from a Personal Essay?
 - A Personal Essay delves into commentary, reporting, and opinions.
 - It tackles the political or social happenings of the times.
 - It uses personal experience to try to sway the reader to lean a particular way. For example, when my neighborhood pool’s membership began to decline, the pool’s property, owned by the city, was at risk of sell-off to the highest bidder: a gas station, an apartment complex, a strip mall, a strip club. I mobilized and pushed our homeowners’ association to add an infusion of cash to the pool’s budget for necessary repairs. In my plea, I touted the value of the swim team, the tennis team, the comradery among members. My Personal Essay attempted to persuade others to understand that a strip club does not benefit my child—swim lessons do.
 - A Memoir focuses on a memory, a particular situation that you’ve experienced without attempting the audience to create a pros and cons list of an issue. For instance, I might write a Flash Memoir about how my mom and I ended up in a march to the Capitol in Washington, DC during a Free Croatia rally in 1991. We didn’t know where Croatia was and mistakenly assumed it was in Canada because so many protesters were waving the red and white maple leaf. I would offer no opinion about the politics of the situation other than that I ought to brush up on my geography.

- The benefits of practicing Flash Memoir:
 - Easily accessible stories (the plot is already written!)
 - Helps refine skills in description
 - Practice reducing wordiness and redundancy
 - Not overwhelming in length
 - Breaks writer's block
 - Allows you to be the best story teller in the room—you can have the best punchlines, the perfect comebacks, and the satisfying I-Told-You-So's!

- Alison's Step One—Selecting a Memory
 - Uncover a story I want to tell. It's should be the story I want to tell my best friend, the Oh My Goodness, I have to tell you this, one. Or maybe it's the one I want to share with my son as he shows me his driver's license for the first time. Or possibly, it's the one I want to tell but I can't tell without tears in my eyes.

- Alison's Step Two—The Structure
 - For me, it's got to be a story with action. Something is happening—and happening quickly. Many times, conversations get the story started. Then there is a disruption, maybe not big enough to be a twist, but something that throws me off balance. The resolution develops swiftly followed by the denouement—kinda the ah-ha moment.
 - Play with it; experiment; writing a short, tight piece, allows you to have fun with words. Create a rhyming pattern; try repetition; use symbolism to the extreme, why not? It's only 500 words! Write in past tense, present tense, heck, future tense. What about first person, second person, close third person. Again, why not?

- Alison’s Step Three—Bring the Story to Life
 - Pepper the story with description—hints of color, smells, tastes, emotions. A singular words dropped here and there create maximum sensory stimulation with the least amount of space.
- Alison’s Step Four—Read Aloud
 - The writing is tight; there is no time to meander, so LISTEN to your story.
 - Use action words; I find present tense the most compelling. Again, this is a great way to practice writing actively. As we move to present tense, the audience is transported into the story with you.
 - Avoid repetition—if it’s repeated (and not on purpose) change it.
- Alison’s Step Five—Blog It
 - Add photos to highlight the details
 - Read Tales from the Laundry Room @ 3DogTales.com