Agenda for March 13 Meeting, Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Group

I. Introductions/Coffee and breakfast items

II. Basic information about the group.

III. Starting out as writers

--Identifying and getting started on what you want to write: Jot down a list of 20 ideas you want to write about. Don’t stop and censor yourself; just write down those ideas no matter what they are or how random they are.

--Next, with each item, make a list of all the material you already have that you could draw on to write some of these stories: letters, photographs, emails, journals, artifacts/memorabilia, other....

IV. The building blocks of "story"--What is a "scene" and how to write one.

V. Wrap-up/next meeting plans

Writing exercise:
Exercise for the next meeting: Take your list of 20 items and pick one to write. Write a short account that does justice to your experience at the time. Bring this with you and be prepared to share if you are willing.

If this exercise does not work with you, go ahead and try something else.
Syracuse Area Veterans’ Intergenerational Writing Group

Good writing takes stamina and determination, and few individuals are more disciplined than military personnel. Good writing requires sharp attention to detail, and troops are drilled constantly on the importance of “situational awareness,” of carefully observing one’s surroundings and mentally noting: What’s different, unique, out of place? Good writing also depends on originality and ingenuity, and service members are trained to improvise and think creatively to solve seemingly insurmountable problems. And troops certainly aren’t lacking in material needed to fire up the imagination; many have accumulated a lifetime of riveting stories from a single deployment. Above all, first-rate writers believe emphatically that language matters, that words are almost sacred. For members of the armed forces, words are more than marks on a page or spoken utterances. They are one’s honor. They are orders and missions. They are life and death.—Andrew Carroll, “Introduction” to Operation Homecoming pamphlet

Description:

The focus of this intergenerational writing group is on veterans writing and sharing nonfiction accounts (memories, autobiographies, true accounts) of life in and out of the military. Veterans of all ages, branches of the military, and conflicts are welcome. Supporters of veterans are also welcome (friends, family members, caregivers, veteran services personnel).

You need not have any prior experience with writing to join this group. All you need is desire to write your stories and share them with others.

Collective Goals for the Group:

- Learning key techniques for nonfiction writing.
- Reading pieces that inspire us and set a good example for the type of writing we may do.
- Drafting stories.
- Sharing your stories and offering feedback to other group members in a supportive and collegial atmosphere.
- Encouraging each other as writers and truth-tellers of our experiences and our realities.
- Polishing and preparing work for publication and public readings. We will eventually produce an edited collection of group members’ work for sharing with families and also for sale at local outlets. We also will offer to read our work publicly when group members are ready to share beyond the group circle.

Meetings: Meetings will be held monthly and in locations to be announced at least two weeks in advance.
Staying in touch between meetings: We will stay in touch the following ways between meetings:

--Email listerv—we will set up an email listerv for all members on email. Please provide me with your current email address.
--We will send out notices to members not on email via the U.S. mail. Please supply me with your mailing address and telephone number. This will not be distributed to anyone but the leaders of this group unless authorized to do so.
--We have a Facebook group you can join called the Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Group. Go to facebook.com to register and type in the group name. The group is open to the public, and I will regularly post resources, announcements there.
--Eventually, we will have a group website with resources.

Hospitality: We will strike a hospitality subcommittee to assist us in providing refreshments at every meeting. In the spirit of war-time canteens, we will always have some kind of refreshment table (see Bob Greene’s Once Upon a Town). Writers need sustenance and caffeine! If you or someone you know would like to volunteer for this subcommittee, please contact me.

Sponsorship and Group Leader: The Syracuse University Writing Program is the sponsor of this group. We welcome co-sponsorship from other organizations that support veterans and their right to creative expression. The group leader is Professor Eileen E. Schell, Chair of the Syracuse University Writing Program, a writing teacher and writing group leader for over 20 years (call me Eileen). I will be joined periodically by other members of the Writing Program staff and instructors, including Ivy Kleinbart, a writer and writing program instructor. You can contact me in the following ways:

Eileen E. Schell eeschell@syr.edu (email)
315-443-1083 (phone, 9-5 p.m. M-F, Syracuse University Writing Program)

Workshop: We will have writing workshops periodically during group sessions. The primary goal in large-group workshops is to listen and provide constructive feedback: comments, questions, and suggestions.

A writer reads his/her piece and listens to feedback. The goal is not to defend your piece or talk back to those who respond, but share it, listen to feedback, and absorb what others make of your piece. You have the right to make changes as you see fit—it’s your writing, so you are ultimately in control of what you produce and how to take into account other’s feedback.

Read-arounds: We will also have “read-arounds” where you read what you wrote and others just listen without commenting. The goal here is to listen to one another’s work without commenting. Afterward, we can have some time for general commenting across the pieces.
Resources: We will build a resource list of books and resources people have found helpful in writing their stories. Some good basic guides to Writing Nonfiction:


I recommend this as a good general guideline to Writing the War-time Experience