Prompt #1: Anniversary

What has it meant to you to be a member of the Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Group? What brought you to the group originally, and what keeps you coming back? How has your writing changed or developed through your interactions in the group? What kinds of concerns or themes have emerged in your writing? How has your relationship to the act of writing changed? How has meditation factored into your writing practice?

Prompt #2: Memorable Lines

Write down some word/lines that have stuck with you through the years.

After compiling those words/lines, go back and embed in a scene. Who said those words to you? Where were you, and where was that person when they were said? And what was happening around you when the words were said? If you don’t remember certain details, just write "I don’t remember" and keep going with what you DO remember.

If this doesn’t work, freewrite for 15 minutes.

Prompt #3: Reflective Writing

While personal essays are mostly comprised of concrete scenes, description, characterization, and dialogue, it’s important to include some reflective writing as well. Reflective writing shows your efforts to make sense of the memories you’re recounting in the essay. It also helps the reader to contextualize each scene within the larger span of your life, to know what this experience meant in shaping you as a person. Depending on your writing style and the overall shape of the piece you’re working on, your reflections can come in small and subtle moments interspersed with scenes, or you might choose to place a paragraph or more of reflective writing after a scene.

Try adding some reflective writing to one of the scenes you’ve already written. Consider these questions as a starting point:

1. How did this experience change your thinking, behavior, spiritual beliefs, politics, or your sense of yourself? How subtle or profound was the change?

2. How did this experience impact your relationship with someone close to you, or with others in general?

3. Did it mark an important turning point in your life’s journey, or was it one of many such experiences that characterized a certain period in your life?

4. How did this experience change your view of the military?
5. In what ways did this experience educate you or open your eyes to part of the world you hadn’t previously seen?

6. If you could go back to that moment, what would you say or do differently?

7. What detail does your mind keep returning to in the scene?

8. Are there any contradictions, inconsistencies, or anomalies that shape your memory of the moment that make it hard to reconcile just what happened?

9. What’s hardest to forgive?

10. If you could speak to your younger self from your current vantage point, what would you say?