Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Group Retreat at the Ridge Golf Club and Clear Path for Veterans

Saturday, October 12, 2013
Meet at the Ridge Golf Club, 1281 Salt Springs Road, Chittenango, NY 13037

8:00-9:00: Conference registration check-in and breakfast items

9:00-9:30: Group Gathers for greetings, brief introductions, and discussion of the workshop schedule

9:30-10:30: Craft Class #1: The Art and Craft of Nonfiction

10:30-11:00: Break

11:00-12:00: Small Group Workshop #1: Workshop on Nonfiction pieces

12:00-1:00 Lunch

After lunch, we will move to Clear Path for Veterans, 1223 Salt Springs Road, Chittenango, NY 13037

1:00-2:30 Activities
Hiking/walking the property
Open time for writing or relaxing
Meditation and journaling

2:30-3:30: Craft Class #2: The Art of Poetry

3:30-4:00: Break

4:00-5:00: Small Group Workshop #2: Poetry or Nonfiction

5:00-6:00: Happy Hour and socializing

6:00-7:00: Dinner

7:00-8:30 Optional Evening read-around session for those who are interested: Writers will read their pieces in progress and give each other feedback.

Workshop leaders will also be on hand to work with participants on revision and line editing.
Sunday, October 13, 2013
Meet at Clear Path for Veterans, 1223 Salt Springs Road, Chittenango, NY 13037

7:30 - 8:30: Morning activities:
Group or individual run or walk on the property
Meditation and journaling

9:00-10:00: Breakfast

10:00-10:30: Opening session for Day 2

10:30-11:30: Craft class #3 on Revision and Publication

11:30-12:00 Break

12:00-1:00: Lunch

1:00-2:00 Small group Workshop #3

2:00-3:00: Break and set-up for reading and closing.

3:00-4:30: Culminating Reading and Closing Ceremony. Families and friends are welcome to attend.

4:30-5:00 Participants depart Clear Path
Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Retreat

Finding Your Subject Material...

Over the course of the next two days, you’ll spend a great deal of time writing. Below is a selection of writing prompts drawn from the Syracuse Veterans’ Writing Group web site, as well as some newly devised prompts. Please feel free to choose one of these prompts to help you begin writing, or write from any other idea that you’ve carried with you to this workshop:

Prompts:

1. Military Firsts
   Take 6-7 mins. to make a quick list of military “firsts,” and then begin writing a paragraph or two about each of several “firsts” on your list. For example, think about your first encounter with a military recruiter, what it was like to arrive at boot camp, the first friend you made in the military, the first military meal you ate, the first letter you received while away from home, the first time you encountered enemy fire, etc.

2. Boot Camp
   Write about your experience of arriving at boot camp and adjusting to the demands and scarcities imposed upon you. Who did you meet/encounter? Was there someone you felt sorry for? What were the greatest challenges (either mentally or physically)? What mistakes did you make?

3. Military Family
   If you come from a military family, how has the military shaped your family’s internal relationships and dynamics? Consider your family’s values, ethics, manners, rituals, ideas about the world, and ways of communicating or expressing yourselves, etc.? Also consider how often you moved as a family, where you lived, and how those aspects of location shaped your family experience/dynamics.

4. Accessing Memory
   Try drawing on the five senses to construct a memory piece about your military service. Some of the SVWG writing prompts and group members’ essays that have tapped into the senses include writing about: the food you
ate in the military, the weather conditions you endured, the music of the times (and sounds of the place you were in—calls to prayer, animal noises, and even the silence), the smell of waste and burning waste, and the pain of being wounded. Take a few minutes to jot down these headers on a piece of paper: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Make a short list of things you remember under each sense category. Then choose a point of focus to start your essay.

5. **Place Description**
   Think of a specific location or place that you remember from your time in the military or in a military family, and describe what it looks like. If possible, build a larger story around it. The place could be as massive as a city or as small as a tent. It could be indoors or out. . . . . It could be a particular table in a chow hall where people gather to eat and talk, the cockpit of a plane, a port-o-john filled with graffiti, or a makeshift soccer field—any place that evokes strong memories and emotions. Again, draw on the five senses to help your reader sense the feeling of what it was like to be in this place.

6. **What Do/Don’t you miss?**
   Divide a piece of paper in two columns and spend 6-7 mins. making a quick list of things you miss and don’t miss from your time in the service. Think about people, places, and things that you either left behind or had to give up when you left the military. Try to use as much descriptive writing as you can. Don’t forget to draw on the five senses, so that others can imagine how it was to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the things you experienced.

7. **Personal Influences**
   Recall a brief but memorable encounter or conversation with someone who influenced you, taught you something valuable, or changed your thinking in a significant way (during your time in the service or beyond)... or, someone who you believe you influenced. Describe your most memorable interaction with this person and reflect on the nature of influence. Try to recall what this person looked like, his/her posture, facial expressions, hand gestures, mannerisms, ways of moving or walking, nervous ticks, etc. Think about this manner of speech, and the kinds of words he/she would use. Try to include specific dialogue if you can remember what either of you said. Consider your relationship to this individual, what he/she meant to you, and what you meant in return.
8. **Wrong Place, Wrong Time**
Recall a time when you either experienced first-hand or witnessed someone else being in the wrong place at the wrong time—for example, an ambush, or a civilian getting caught in the crossfire or being mistaken for the enemy. Describe what happened.

9. **Failures of Communication**
Communication failures define our daily experiences and relationships. Most writers actively struggle with their desire and perpetual failure to communicate, and many veterans struggle with how to communicate to a loved one what they experienced in the military. Sometimes miscommunication can produce humorous results, and other times, it can have serious consequences. Recall a military situation that was shaped by miscommunication: bad translation, bad intelligence, orders improperly conveyed, a dispute between two or more people in your unit, or any misunderstanding or miscommunication that occurred between you and someone back home. Write a scene in which you describe one instance of miscommunication or frustrated communication that sticks powerfully in your memory.

10. **Coming “Home”**
Describe how it was to try to “come home” from war. Since this might be a difficult story to tell, try to come at it from a specific angle. Think about a place that was hard to go back to, an experience that felt awkward, a stupid remark someone made about your service, or a ritual as basic as learning to sleep in your own bed again. What did you need that you didn’t have or couldn’t get? What services or support did you finally find that helped you begin to make your “return”?

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1 ([drawn from the NEA’s “Operating Homecoming” pamphlet available for download at: http://www.nea.gov/pub/OH WritersGuide.pdf](http://www.nea.gov/pub/OH WritersGuide.pdf))