

Creative writing: telling your family story

Start date 28 November 2020

End date 29 November 2020

Venue Virtual Classroom

Tutor Derek Niemann

Course code 2021NDR224

Director of Academic Centres Dr Corinne Boz

For further information on this course, please contact Head of Academic Centre Administration, Sarah Blakeney
sarah.blakeney@ice.cam.ac.uk

To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Derek Niemann is a freelance writer and editor specialising in natural history. In 2012, he interrupted a career writing about bees and butterflies to begin researching and writing a family history story that was published in 2015 as *A Nazi in the Family* (Short Books), based on the SS grandfather he never knew. His most recent non-fiction book *A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland* was published in October 2016 (Short Books). Derek's other non-fiction title was *Birds in a Cage* (Short Books, 2011), telling the story of four Prisoner of War birdwatchers in World War II. Derek is a country diary columnist for the *Guardian* and edits the magazine of the Small Woods Association. Formerly he was children's magazines editor for the RSPB (1998-2014) and has written a number of wildlife books for children.

Course programme

DATE Saturday 28 November

- 10.00-11.00am **Session 1: What's the story?**
In our opening session we share our family stories. What do you know and what is missing?
- 11.30-12.30pm **Session 2: A creative approach to life writing**
How do you go about telling your family story? There are so many imaginative ways to do it.
- 2-3pm **Session 3: The joys of research**
How you can use archives and documents to help make your story come alive.

DATE Sunday 29 November

- 10.00-11.00am **Session 4: A sense of place**
Every story happens somewhere. What are the tricks for turning locations into reality?
- 11.30-12.30pm **Session 5: Bringing objects to life**
How do we animate inanimate objects and fire up our stories? This session places a special emphasis on photographs.
- 2-3pm **Session 6: Rounding off**
Our concluding session covers ethics, the reliability of memory and filling the gaps. We end with general questions and answers.

Course syllabus

Aims:

1. To explore a range of styles and techniques in life writing.
2. To develop participants' skills in researching and capturing life writing in words.
3. To increase participants' awareness and appreciation of the tools that go to producing life writing and resources that are available for them to mine the past.
4. To hone research skills in using official and unofficial records.

Content:

This course offers students fresh perspectives on producing creative writing tied to their own family story. We will be examining the work of a wide range of writers of different backgrounds and nationalities to find ideas and inspiration. Students will learn about resources available for researching their family story and their family's histories and how to make use of them. And the course will encourage participants to write about family history in engaging and creative ways, exploring the imaginative possibilities in documents, letters, everyday objects and places.

Presentation of the course:

This course will involve a mixture of class discussion and practical work.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. Recognise the techniques in which life writers make their subject real for the reader.
2. Feel confident in researching and interpreting records, as well as investigating and drawing from archives.
3. Be able to identify other sources of material to follow up family history stories and, if they so wish, feel empowered to write up their own family history.
4. Begin to write up the family's story.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Cline, Sally and Angier, Carole	<i>Life writing: a writers' & artists' companion</i>	Bloomsbury (2013)
Edemariam, Aida	<i>The Wife's Tale</i>	4 th Estate (2018)
Morrison, Blake	<i>Things my mother never told me</i>	Chatto & Windus (2002)
Niemann, Derek	<i>A Nazi in the Family</i>	Short Books (2015)
Sands, Philippe	<i>East West Street</i>	Weidenfeld & Nicholson (2016)
Verzemnieks, Inara	<i>Among the Living and the Dead</i>	Pushkin Press (2018)

Additional information

What you will need

The course is open to anyone, however it is taught via a virtual classroom. You will be able to see, hear and interact with your classmates and the tutor. In order to participate you will need to have a laptop, computer, tablet or other device equipped with a camera (webcam), speakers and a microphone.

Full instructions and support on the use of the software will be given on request.

Venue

This course takes place online using the teleconferencing software ZOOM.

If you have any queries about the software or accessing the course, please contact us by e-mailing creativewriting@ice.cam.ac.uk.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 07 September 2020