

## The Memoir Writing Workbook

Memories into Memoir

# The By-Roads to Freedom

## Truth

## Exercise 23

*It is the internal truth of your memoir that remains unaltered in your writing. The external truth can be altered – but not to the point where it changes the factual truth.*

Truth lies in the by-roads that we don't always want to travel. Yet when we do, we seem to cross a threshold and invite into our lives a new perspective on our past and gain a freedom previously unknown.

I feel it is a huge challenge in our lives to be honest, really *really* honest – and particularly with ourselves. Sometimes we don't even realise we are being dishonest; feelings can get buried and we can live life in denial and refuse to accept the truth. Sometimes withholding the truth can change the course of a life, or lives. Sometimes we cannot cope with the changes honesty will inevitably bring and sometimes it is not the time for the truth to be known.

Truth though is a very elusive part of our lives. We all live in some part with dishonesty – dishonesty with ourselves, dishonesty with our partners, dishonesty with our families, dishonesty within our working lives.

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### **Internal Truth**

**Internal truth is our personal choice as to how truthful we are with ourselves.**

### **External Truth**

**External truth is not personal – but it is a large part of our lives.**

It seems that at different stages of life individuals confront truth in various ways and with different levels of honesty. For instance, consider how truth would have a different meaning in each of the following circumstances:

- **30-year-old female intent upon excavating her life and being prepared to write about deep trauma from her past**
- **49-year-old living in denial who has always sought comfort from substances**
- **80-year-old recalling the daisies of life, the good times with family and friends and the influences that shaped their lives**

Truth in each of the above situations will vary not only because of age, but because of personal choice and the view of inner and outer worlds. I call this *internal truth*; it is our personal choice as to how truthful we are with ourselves.

*External truth* is different. It comes from being the observer and relating your view of circumstances.

Think of the following situations where external truth would affect each circumstance:

- **an explorer intent on revealing hidden facets of the world**

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- **a journalist reporting from the front line**
- **a doctor being honest with a dying patient**

External truth is not personal, but it is a large part of our lives.

In writing about an event that was significant to you, you will be writing about the effect it had upon you personally. That is your internal truth – your emotional truth about the situation. Another person recounting the same event will have a different slant on it, which will be their internal and emotional truth.

This is what makes us unique as individuals and subsequently what makes our writing unique. What you are always striving for is to be as objective as possible about a situation, to view it with wisdom in hindsight, with no hint of personal judgement or revenge as you recall your experience and tell your truth. Perhaps there is never one real truth in any situation.

Yet it is important to remember that there is a difference between truth and changing the hair colour of the woman who lived next door, or names that you do not want to be made known.

It is the internal truth of your memoir that remains unaltered in your writing. The external truth can be altered, but not to the point where it changes the factual truth.

It is the experience that you are relating in your story which you must stay true to as much as possible. You do not make up experiences in memoir writing. You do not *pretend* things happened – if you pretend, you are writing fiction.

In writing, telling the truth and the enormity of uncovering a life incident can make us vulnerable and hold us back. It can be a blockage point and a great personal challenge, but it can also

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be a gateway to real freedom.

This challenge often surfaces when one feels incapable of telling the truth about an incident. It is a block that can keep one from writing and creating generally. But it is these charged life incidents that make for good writing. It is our challenge as writers to express these experiences from a distance and without judgement. Ironically, it is the events about which people say, "I couldn't possibly tell that," which usually form the true essence of their stories.

Honesty takes time; time with ourselves and our feelings, time to admit just what was going on, and time to sit with the truth. Dishonest writing comes from holding back on telling the truth, not telling it like it really was.

Our minds are very skilled at...