

PROMPTS

A Note to Writers:

We have a very specific format for the show. We do not accept personal essays. This seems to be the biggest stumbling block that writers trip over when they submit to us. The basic difference between a literary memoir (what we do on the show) and a personal essay is that a literary memoir just tells the story (just like a fictional short story), while a personal essay has commentary from the writer. There are other differences, and sometimes the two forms overlap, but for our purposes and for writers who want to submit this is the distinction we make. We want stories, no commentary. We want the story (broken down into scenes) to show the message.

I believe it was Janet Burroway who once said, "Only trouble is interesting." And this is true of the literary memoirs (henceforth "stories") on our show. Something must happen: there must be tension and conflict, either internal, external, or both. There must be a clear narrative structure (not just a chronology of events, but a story, with rising action, climax, falling action). The story must be told in first person (I), and it must be the storyteller's story. We are looking for something to happen.

The stories must be twofold: they are heard on the radio, but they are also read in our books. These are literary memoirs, usually utilizing literary techniques such as foreshadowing, flashbacks, symbolism, metaphors and similes, and figurative language. We have very experienced and helpful editors who will help you hone and polish your story, so we always suggest just writing the story down, getting it in the best form you can, and then send it to us, understanding that we will be asking for edits.

Another stumbling block we've found writers trip over is that they send us something that they wrote several years ago, or even recently, but not for this show. It's fine to submit something that you did not write specifically for this show, but keep in mind that we WILL ask for a revision, and most likely a substantial revision, to fit the format of the show. You must be willing to change your work, sometimes to a completely different piece, as the piece you submit may not be what we are looking for as far as structure but we may like an idea in the piece. If you submit your work to our show, you must be willing to revise it. If you are not comfortable with revising, or you think your submission is perfect as-is, please do not submit.

So, here are some prompts to perhaps get your memories going. No need to stop here- go wherever you go and see where the writing takes you. We're looking forward to your submissions!

Specific Events

(the key here is that there is a universal truth that is being explored. You don't need to worry about this as you write (other than thinking as you revise about how this story relates to the listeners/readers), but understand that this is what we will focus on as we edit your submission to get it ready for the show.)

- Your first day of school
- A spiritual experience from childhood (not necessarily religious)
- A spiritual experience from adolescence (not necessarily religious)
- A spiritual experience as an adult (not necessarily religious)
- An unexplained occurrence
- The first concert you ever went to
- The worst trouble you ever got into as a kid
- The worst thing you ever did as a kid/adult but never got caught
- The thing you are most ashamed of (something you did or did not do)
- A random act of kindness that was done for/to you
- The most emotionally painful sunset/sunrise you ever saw
- A confrontation with a bully, either that you were a part of or witnessed
- The last time you laughed so hard you cried
- The most incredible story anyone has ever told you
- The worst lie you ever told
- The worst lie that was ever told to you
- The most indulgent thing you have ever done
- Your first visit to New Orleans
- The most memorable birthday of your life
- The day you realized that your mother/father was not a superhero
- The first time you stood up to someone close to you (parent, sibling, spouse, etc)
- The best prank you ever did to someone, or that someone did to you
- The time you thought you had won the lottery/hit it big at Vegas/somehow came into a lot of money (a split second of thinking that it was true)
- An incident in your life when you were 10 years old that you now look back on and wish you had known/understood something then that you do now.
- The first time you smoked a cigarette
- The first time you shoplifted/stole something from someone

Additional Prompts

(the key here is that you write a story, not just an essay about these ideas. We need a specific scene, with narrative elements (dialogue, action, exposition, flashback, etc) and narrative structure (rising action, climax, falling action)).

- When you first became disillusioned with adults
- When you had a faltering of faith (got mad at God or the Universe)
- Realizing you weren't in love with someone anymore
- Completing/finishing/doing something no-one thought you could.
- Your biggest accomplishment
- Something very reckless that seemed fun at the time
- Your first big political let-down
- Being crazy about someone from a distance only to finally meet them and be disappointed
- Interaction with someone outside of your culture where you judged them completely wrong (OR they judged you completely wrong)
- An injustice that you observed that you did not stop or intervene
- I wish I never would have...
- I wish I would have....

Holiday:

The year that you realized Santa wasn't real.

The year that you didn't get the one toy/present you were hoping for.

The year that you found and opened all of the presents and then rewrapped them.

Seeing a cousin/aunt/uncle in a new light during the holidays.

A funny thing that happened at Church or at a Christmas dinner

Your first Christmas/Hannukuh away from home

Your first Christmas /Hannukuh with your baby

The last Christmas with someone you love

A Christmas without all of the mass-marketing (no tree, no presents, etc.)

Staying up all night putting together toys for children on Christmas Eve

A Holiday tradition gone wrong