

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

You've always wanted to write a story about your life. You've been planning to do it, telling family and friends you are going to do it . . . but you haven't done it.

Why not?

The answer is usually an apology of some sort, a sad tale of enduring hope and the busyness of your life.

What I've discovered, traveling around the country, teaching thousands of people to write stories about their lives, is that it isn't lack of desire or even busyness that keeps people from getting their stories down on paper. It's a sheer lack of know-how.

And frankly, the books currently available for aspiring memoirists fail to spell out a simple process: one-two-three.

*Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir* does that. It gives you the steps without a lot of fancy mumbo jumbo about literature and books you haven't read and never will.

I don't focus on other memoirs because they are not the point when you are learning how to do this. You need to stay focused on your own life so you can snatch up forgotten memories, avoid

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the intimidation that comes from reading more practiced writers, and sidestep the natural tendency to get swept away into the lives of other writers.

The point is *your* life.

*Shimmering Images* spells out a technique to get straight to the heart of your life, where the richest material resides. Then it shows you how to structure a memoir.

Plain and simple.

There are three parts to this book.

Part 1 talks about ideas behind writing a memoir, like why you need to pen your story and why you have the right to speak your truth.

Part 2 introduces *Shimmering Images*—the magic key to everything—then charts a simple step-by-step process for narrowing your focus, capturing your most powerful stories, and using them to construct the framework of a memoir.

Part 3 gives you a quick look at some of the craft of writing—tools, I call them—but only the stuff that will help you hone your memoir, not a lot of other stuff, useful to a writer, surely, but not necessarily pertinent to this process.

It's that simple, my friends.

And then the book is done. I'm out of here, and you keep using the process for the rest of your life. It's my gift to you—short, sweet, and, yep, simple: Lisa's three s's.

Why am I passionate about giving you this process?

That's pretty simple, too.

I believe writing memoir is the most effective way to change the world. Sounds lofty, I know, but honestly, the way I see it, when you write your story, you codify a truth about past experience.

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That act changes you, opens up new, stunning possibilities for your future, and when witnessed by a reader—if you’ve done your job well and written with authenticity—the sheer act of sharing your truth allows that reader to claim her own truth. She codifies her story; someone witnesses that. And on and on we go.

If we write bighearted, compassionate stories, we have the chance to model forgiveness, to get beyond the old tales of past events; we have the chance to change the way people perceive their experiences. I can’t think of a better way to spend my energy on Planet Earth, and since I know this process works, I simply love handing out these exquisitely refined tools.

It took a lot of years to get these tools down to the basics, I’ll tell you that. Fact is, I’ve been perfecting this for as long as I’ve been a writer—through teaching full-time at universities, leading workshops from New York to Los Angeles, coaching clients across the country who are writing books, and instructing season after season of classes for the Extension Writers’ Program at UCLA. A friend asked me to estimate how many students I’d worked with over the years, sharing the idea of *Shimmering Images* and helping them write their stories. “That’s a tough one,” I said, but I put some thought into it and decided five to six thousand people would be a conservative estimate. I know the bulk of those students got what they needed from this technique to craft a story about their life, a story that made a difference, and this brings me joy.

How did I get started with this memoir technique?

I began just like you: with talent, burning desire, and an unrelenting drive to pursue my dream of writing and publishing. About ten years ago, after fifteen-plus years of apprenticeship, my memoir *Hawk Flies Above: Journey to the Heart of the Sandhills* was published by Picador USA. It got some great reviews and

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won comparisons to the work of Annie Dillard. But even before that I'd started teaching what I was passionate about—how to speak your truth and turn it into a story. For more than twenty-five years I've been laser focused on the creative process and the craft of writing personal stories because that exploration spoke to my soul, called me, over and over again.

What I've gleaned from all this work is such a tight format for capturing and writing your stories that I don't need much more than one hundred pages to explain it.

And you don't need more than that to learn it.

Here it is. *Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir*. It's lyrical, playful, direct, and to the point, a pristine snapshot of the process writers use to illuminate the truth of their lives and write a story people will dash out to buy.

Bottom line: I could wax philosophic and analytic for pages, dragging out this book, but I don't want to waste your time. All I want to do is show you how to put your story together, and to get you writing.

The inspiration stage is fragile and elusive, and courting it is an art, so let's not waste it. Let's get to the juice.

Life is short.

Your stories are waiting, and I'm excited about helping you reach your dream.