

# Welcome



## Self-Discovery in Memoir G25080403

with Deborah Taffa  
August 29-August 31, 2025

Greetings Essayists, Dabblers in Diaries, Lovers of Lyric Language—

How fantastic that you've decided to nurture your inner artist at Ghost Ranch! I began my own journey to publication one weekend at the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, so I know the excitement you are feeling. My goal for our workshop is to feed your imagination, and encourage your playfulness with language, while also introducing you to the dynamic possibilities present in creative nonfiction.

Please keep track of this information as it contains important information for your course, "Self-Discovery in Memoir." The course involves one writing assignment that you must do in advance. This assignment should be 500 words maximum! Please note that your writing assignment should be double spaced in 12-point font, titled, and printed before coming to class. Ideally, you will bring at least 10 copies.

Below you will find the reading list for the class. Number two on the following list is the writing assignment I mentioned above. In other words, please note that *Rain*, by Kathleen Norris contains the writing assignment that I would like you to prepare and email to me before coming to class!

1. *Variations on Grief*, by Meghan Daum is a personal essay.
2. *Rain*, by Kathleen Norris is a lyric essay.
3. *The End of the Line*, by Jim Kennedy is a braided essay.
4. *Place*, by Dorothy Allison is a craft essay.
5. *Powder*, by Tobias Wolff is a narrative essay.

In addition to talking about structure, the development of perso-

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na, and the need for courage in writing, we will also talk about the writing assignment you turned in for the workshop. The rest of the time we will discuss the readings assigned above, examining them for setting, plot, character development, and most especially, the role of agency in a first-person narrative. How does a cautionary tale close the story and prevent you from developing a literary persona? How do we draft characters of ourselves and others that feel real? We will spend time discussing what I like to call “the art of self-confrontation” in memoir. Trust is an important factor in workshops.

In our weekend together, I promise to honor your spirit and intent, while celebrating your growth as an artist. Writing a memoir requires both vulnerability and courage, and I admire your desire to share your stories with others.

Dawa’eh,

Deborah Jackson Taffa  
MFACW Director at the IAIA  
Author, Whiskey Tender  
deborahaffa@gmail.com

Course Materials: Please bring a notebook and pen, or a computer to each day of class. Also, have the copy of your writing assignment, an “after” essay based on the handout titled, “Rain,” by Kathleen Norris.

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### **Friday, August 29, 2025**

Students arrive at Ghost Ranch, socialize over dinner then join Deborah Taffa from 7pm-9pm for a conversation about setting as a form of character development. Please come to class having already read the essay, "Place," by Dorothy Allison. An icebreaker, writing prompt, and sharing session will round out the evening.

### **Saturday morning, August 30, 2025**

Students will convene for a morning session: 9am to noon. Craft elements of memoir writing such as character development, pacing, family lore, supposition, and the art of drafting a first-person narrator (with agency) will be addressed through the discussion of the following reading assignments: "Variations on Grief," by Meghan Daum (and) "Powder," by Tobias Wolff. A few writing prompts complete with small group sharing will fill out the three hours.

### **Saturday afternoon, August 30, 2025**

Students will convene for an afternoon session: 2pm-5pm. The psychological demands of memoir writing will be addressed in this session. The role of fear and pride, strategies for avoiding cautionary tales and flat characters, as well as the act of self-confrontation in locating one's non-negotiable stories will be discussed. What is the role of imagination and style in getting to deeper truths? A discussion of the following reading assignment, "The End of the Line," by Jim Kennedy will aid us in our discussion, as will the writing assignment based on "Rain" that you did on your own before joining the class.

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### **Sunday afternoon, August 31, 2025**

Students will convene for a final hour on Sunday morning: 8:30am-9:30am. You will have had a night to reexamine your writing assignment based on “Rain” for a discussion about revision. Group sharing from volunteers will carry some of the morning, though we will end with Deborah giving practical pointers on how to stay inspired as you continue writing on your own at home.