Texts: *Liar’s Club*—Mary Karr: Penguin 9780143035749  
*The Glass Castle*—Jeanette Walls—Little, Brown, 2010 isbn: 9780743247542  
*This Boy’s Life*—Tobias Wolfe—Grove—ISBN-10: 0802136680 (recommended)  
*A Moveable Feast*—Hemingway—9780684824994 (recommended, not ordered or req.)  
*Half a Life*—Darin Strauss—Random House—978-0-8129-8253  
*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*—Dave Eggers—Vintage—978-D-375-72578

Course Description: This is a writing intensive course in a workshop format with a final portfolio as the basis for 80% of the grade. Students will complete readings of the above memoirs (an alternate of your choice is possible if you run it by me) and complete various writing assignments based on memory. Students will then read their exercises to classmates during the workshop process. (See Workshop Guidelines).

Objectives: Through the workshop method, reading assigned examples of memoir, and various exercises in writing from memory, students will gain the tools and experience necessary to evaluate their own and their classmates' efforts in the genre, and will begin work on their own memoir.

Requirements: Students will write three short exercises in the memoir (2-3 pages for undergrads, 3-5 pages for grad students), culminating in a longer episode (8-10 pages for undergrads, 10-15 pages for grad. students, or the equivalent number of pages in shorter passages). A longer piece may develop out of one or more of the shorter exercises (pages noted for longer piece will be slightly lengthened if, for example, you use two or three of the shorter exercises). Minimum total number of final draft pages for undergrad portfolios: 15 (excluding revisions which must accompany the final drafts); minimum total number of pages for grads: 20. Maximum number of pages for undergrads: 19; for grads: 25. Never workshop or hand in work you’ve completed before this semester unless you ask me first. The revision process is important in this class. Minimum page requirements indicate requirements for a passing grade if the work is free of surface errors and demonstrates sufficient sophistication of style and tone. As I’ve already stated, a portfolio of drafts and finished pieces is the main source of your grade (80%). Attendance is also so important in a workshop that its weight is twenty per cent. Generally speaking, this is not a literature course, per se. The texts are models and resource books.

Grades: If you miss even one full class, your chance for an A is almost impossible, as each class meets for almost five hours—or more than a week’s worth of one hour classes—no matter how good your writing is (some exceptions have been made). Student work will not be graded individually for a variety of pedagogical reasons, among them the notion that the work will be revised several times after first turned in, therefore a grade on an early draft does not reflect an accurate evaluation of the eventual shape of that work. A portfolio grade is different from a final grade in the class. The final grade reflects your performance in class as well as your performance in the portfolio. Were you on time for each class? Did you make helpful appropriate comments on most people’s work? Generally I make all announcements and handle general
questions about assignments, etc. at the beginning of class. If you miss those first few minutes and come in late often, I will find your entrance distracting—your participation grade will therefore suffer (please talk to me if work delays your office time). Students who are late often will need explanations I’ve already given at the beginning of the class. I am intolerant of this type of self-centered behavior. Please ask students for any material you miss because of your tardiness or absence. You might get an A on your portfolio and a B or B- in the class if you are absent for half of a few classes, wander in or out, or put your head down and sleep during workshopping (it has happened), send or receive text messages during class (if you keep your phone in your lap and receive texts, you could fail the class—see civility code), or fail to speak up during workshops.

Generally, I treat this course as a studio art course in terms of grades. In addition, the general convention in studio art or art production courses is one which runs counter to the notion of assigning grades and, instead, works to give feedback to the student on the strengths and weaknesses of his or her work. I am neither trying to quash or exalt anyone; I’m merely trying to move you along to a better place in terms of your style, etc.

If your punctuation and mechanics are way off, your grade will also suffer, dramatically. Self-starters and assertiveness in terms of participation earn students higher grades. According to the Handbook, I cannot give an Incomplete unless most of the course work is complete, and a student is passing the course at the time of request. Then it is simply up to the faculty member to agree but we can not be forced to do so—it is at our discretion. I simply do not do it except in severe emergencies—the only example I can think of is when a student was in a car accident and lost an arm which had to be surgically re-attached and rehabilitated. Get the point? I don’t give incompletes.

If you are the type of student who is overly anxious about grades; if you are the type of student who is taking this class to meet a requirement, and you feel you need a high grade; if, in other words, you are indifferent to the exploratory, high-risk nature of the process involved with any creative act, I advise you now that this is an unstructured class in many ways, and it may not be designed for you. This is a course in a literary art form, and whether or not you can create it. If you are indifferent to literature up until now, it’s time to change that.

The reason attendance is so important is because the class format is a workshop, and a workshop's success is contingent on the commitment of its members to the workshop process. This process is further explained in an appendix to this document.

Final Exam: none. Portfolios are due on May 8 by 5:00 pm sharp. Late portfolios will not be accepted, and if I give an extension, your grade is nevertheless reduced for lateness as per my judgment.

Civility Code: A level of civility is expected in my class that is based on the following list of precepts.
1. All participants in the class must be treated with respect.
2. When I am talking to the class, conversations between students are not permitted at any time. When working in groups, please be kind and considerate to each other.
3. Cell phones must be turned off upon entrance to class. No text messaging during class; no cell phones on desks or tables; they must out of sight during classtime.

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4. No use of laptops without a learning disability note from counseling and testing that requires for psychological or physiological reasons that you use a laptop. If that note is forthcoming, students must sit up front near me so that screen is partially visible to me.
5. Even if I accept late work, you’ll always be penalized for it.
5. By remaining in this class, you indicate your agreement to the terms above and below: you have been forewarned about civility expectations and workshop guidelines, both verbal and written.

A few writing guidelines:
1. Avoid over use of adjectives and adverbs.
2. Use action verbs if possible.
3. Avoid excessive use of progressive verbs (“ing”—doing vs do; running vs run)
4. Keep verb tenses simple and consistent—avoid verb tense shifts
5. Always write about what matters to you. Always.
6. Use image and sensory material, not abstractions whenever possible
7. avoid “riddles” or hidden, cryptic stylistic devices
8. no cheap tricks
9. no tricks
10. avoid graphic sexual content completely—this isn’t a workshop for a porn site
11. Do not use quotation marks around or underline your own title

ON REVISION: Revising is more than simply correcting the grammatical issues, or other small changes. Revision means re-seeing. If, in class, I miss or the class misses a punctuation error, you are still responsible for catching these kinds of errors in your revisions. You are also responsible for larger issues, developing your work beyond the original if the early draft is somewhat weak.

Class reading and writing assignments: week one: The Liar’s Club—Karr; first 3 weeks; second 4 weeks: A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius; 3rd four weeks: (This Boy’s Life)—Wolf and Half a Life—Darrin Straus; last three weeks: The Glass Castle—Jeanette Walls. Writing assignments:

Choose three out of the following list of suggested starting points for exercises. We’ll workshop them for the first two weeks of classes, then start workshopping longer pieces the 6th class (June 14). Always bring a hard copy of a shorter piece with you (that hasn’t already been workshopped), even if you’re not up to bat, in case we have time to workshop an extra piece.

first one is mandatory: A conversation you remember
What’s the first thing you remember?
What’s the worst, best, or most embarrassing thing that’s ever happened to you?
A family holiday travel piece
A vacation alone or weekend alone while on the road or individual travel piece.
A family holiday meal
An accident you witnessed or were involved in
On: a parent, a sibling, or a relative
On: a date, a prom, a dance, or a party (nothing graphic!)
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A religious or spiritual experience
An experience of art: a painting, a concert, a book, etc.
A dream
A brush with fame
Shopping
Playing a sport
A time when you were scared and what you did.
A time when you were angry and what you did.
Loss of a pet or other pet story—can’t merely be about “cuteness”

If one of these assignments opens into other material, abandon the above list and proceed with your work.

Pet Peeves— I do not like it when students whine or complain, so please refrain from this behavior. I do not need to know why you are missing a class of mine, but I'll say “fine” if you do explain it. Medical emergencies with doctor’s notes, do not shift the penalty for absences. Please never use “meds” as an excuse for rude or weird behavior.