

Introducing—The Temple Sholom Memoir Writing Group

Moderated by Rabbi David Hartley Mark, MA, M.Phil.

Meeting on Wed., 1/20, at 4 pm, and all Wednesdays thereafter

Dear Friends,

Our Wed. 4pm discussion group began with Adult Hebrew for Tourists. We progressed from there to Bible/Tanakh, focusing on the prophet-priest Samuel, King Saul, and his successor, David.

With the New Year 2021 full of hope and expectations, it's time to switch this time slot to Memoir Writing—the greatest drama of your life, with yourself in the main starring role. We hope to cover:

1. Coming of age
2. Poverty, Wealth, or Middle-class?
3. The Importance of Education (or did you go to work at an early age to provide for the family?)
4. The Excitement of Young Adulthood
5. War and Peace: National Service
6. Marriage
7. Parenthood: The Toughest Job We'll Ever Do
8. Friendships Old and New
9. Leadership: in Family or Profession
10. Making Choices: Some Easy, Some Tough
11. Compassion
12. Survival
13. Dealing with loss
14. Self-Esteem

PLEASE NOTE: Your choice of the above is only a suggestion. The group does not wish to probe any confidentialities.

Group Guidelines—

We are here to offer support to one another. We will keep criticism encouraging. If a fellow writer is sharing a tender, sensitive, or tragic moment, we will remember the confidentiality of the group. We do not judge; rather, we offer support to our fellow writer.

We will listen actively, to really hear what the speaker/writer is saying, rather than being lost in our own thoughts about our writing.

We envision in our hour-long session that perhaps three writers will have time to read their selection; there may be more.

For the first session, on Wed., 1/20 at 4pm, please jot down a few notes to answer the following questions, by way of getting acquainted:

Why are you here? For whom are you writing your life stories?

I have heard many times the main excuse why people are reluctant to write down their life's stories: "There's no need to write my stories down. Everyone in the family knows them; I've told them many times."

Believe me, the kids and grandkids don't know all the stories. Besides, you (or your parents and grandparents) are the ones to whom these stories happened. No one can tell them the way you do, and they are a priceless legacy to leave to one's family and friends.

Two final caveats: you do not have to write about your entire life (unless you want to). Begin with the best stories, and take it from there.

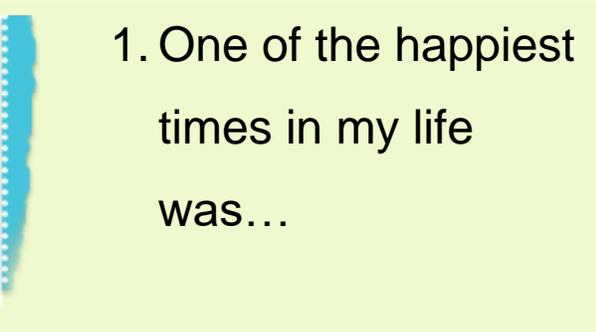
Also, this is a Writing Group—not Oral Storytelling. Participants will **not** be permitted to tell stories; they must read from a manuscript, whether typed or handwritten.

Welcome to the Group!

BRAINSTORM

Memoirs from Life

A good memoir will tell a story that reveals something unique about you. Here are some writing prompts to get you started thinking of a good topic for your memoir:



1. One of the happiest
times in my life
was...

2. One of the saddest times in my life was...
3. I came to the important realization that...
4. I realized that I was no longer a child when...
5. The best birthday present I ever received was...
6. My favorite holiday is...because...
7. My favorite place is...
8. When I was little, I used to...
9. I was proud of myself for...

10. I was ashamed of myself for...
11. I have never been so engrossed in learning as when...
12. I spent time with someone who was much different from me when...
13. A time when I decided to do something differently from everyone else around me was...
14. The person who has had the biggest influence on me is...

15. An experience that challenged me was...
16. One of my biggest successes was...
17. One of my biggest failures was...
18. I realized that I had a talent for...
19. The worst thing that has ever happened to me is...
20. I was in grave danger when...

ESSAY

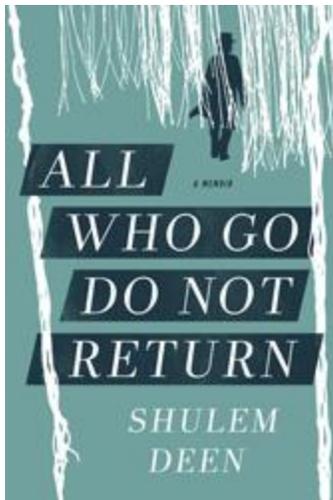
Shulem Deen's Top 10 Rules for Memoir Writing

Shulem Deen

January 14, 2016

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Jewish Book Council was honored to present Shulem Deen, the author of the 2015 National Jewish Book Awards winner of the Myra H. Kraft Memorial Award for Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice **All Who Go Do Not Return**, as the keynote speaker at the annual **Jewish Writers' Seminar** last month. “Lots of people mistake memoir writing for therapy; I mistook therapy for storytelling,” he began his unforgettable address on recognizing the form of his writing as a craft, rather than an indulgence. For those who missed the speech in its entirety, Jewish Book Council is proud to publish its conclusion, a countdown of the most important rules for memoir writing, according to Shulem Deen:

- 10.** You don't need to have had an “interesting life”; only the ability to see life in interesting ways.
- 9.** Memoir isn't autobiography; its unifying principle should be thematic, not just “My Life.”
- 8.** Just because it happened doesn't mean it's interesting. Be selective with both scenes and details.
- 7.** Don't come dressed in a three-piece suit. If your memoir doesn't embarrass you at least a little, you're not doing it right.
- 6.** If you've been wronged: press charges, file a lawsuit, or hire a hit-man. Never, ever, *ever* use memoir to get back at someone.

5. Write from your scars, not from your wounds. If you need to, do your therapy first.
4. Find your three-act narrative arc early on, and you'll avoid having to trash hundreds of pages.
3. Sections and chapters must have a cumulative effect. If it doesn't propel the narrative — by helping to build tension, or resolving it — it doesn't belong. Cut it.
2. Be truthful. This should be obvious.
1. Always remember: memoir might be *about* you, but it's not *for* you.



It's for your reader. Respect that.

Shulem Deen is a former Skverer Hasid and the author of the memoir All Who Go Do Not Return. His work has appeared in The Forward, Tablet, and Salon. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Related Content:

- [Interview with Shulem Deen](#)
- [Shulem Deen's Visiting Scribe Posts](#)
- [The Fiction, Nonfiction, and Memoirs That Shaped Jewish Literature in 2015](#)

Shulem Deen is a former Skverer Hasid and the founding editor of Unpious. His work has appeared in The Jewish Daily Forward, Tablet, and Salon. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.