



Book Review

Flying Time

Suzanne North; Brindle & Glass Publishing, 2014.

Suzanne North, Canadian novelist from Calgary and Saskatchewan, has pulled off quite a coup: recounting an engaging story from the World War II era while teaching us how to write from prompts with a facilitator through the voice of a contemporary nursing home protagonist.

Kay Jeynes (currently a widow in Calgary) writes about how she and her nursing home friend Meggie are growing in understanding as they write with prompts. She describes what she thinks is intended by the prompts, her questions about the process, and how she meanders off topic often. Most important, we see the energy for life the writing gives her now. Through her writing, Kay shows how the prompts bring out an amazing story about how her most important day was the day she began the best job of her life, through which she learned respect for cultural and ethnic differences, the depth of intergenerational friendship, different meanings of love, and resilient living with regrets.

This book can inspire any of us, especially older persons like myself, to record stories from our lives. The author, through the protagonist, shows us how to create tension, arousing emotions of curiosity, surprise, empathy, wonder, grief, fear, and especially love. She uses dialogue to draw us into the story. I was originally reluctant to use dialogue within memoir because I did not record conversations as they happened. Yet, teachers of memoir argue that we need to re-create scenes from our life.

Reconstructing dialogue faithful to the truth of our experience is a useful technique to engage the reader. The task of creating faithful conversations draws us deeper into the experience from the point of view of the participants, including our younger selves.

Let me end with a quote from the novel, Kay commenting on going through her old snow-boot box, which her granddaughter had brought to the nursing home to help with memories:

Janice was spot on about old odds and ends triggering memories. Until I saw myself in that photo, I didn't remember how it felt to stand there all those years ago on the brink of a journey that would take me halfway round the world. I know I didn't sleep much the night before I left. I was too excited to be tired.

Assignment List Given to the Writing Group in the Novel

1. Fill five pages
2. What was the most important day of your life?
3. What was the best or worst job you ever had?
4. Has religion played a role in your life?
5. Tell about your education (try to include some dialogue)
6. Is there a person — not a family member — who was particularly important in your life?
- [A missed assignment]: Tell about an experience which opened your heart.
7. Did your family celebrate holidays and other special occasions?
8. Discuss a single year in your life that you consider particularly significant
9. Do you enjoy travelling?
10. Was (or is) there a great love in your life?
11. Is there anything in your life that you regret?