

## **Memoir Quotations**

### Understanding the Self

It is looking at things for a long time  
that ripens you  
and gives you a deeper understanding.  
~ Vincent Van Gogh

Deciding to remember, and what to remember, is how we decide who we are.  
~ Robert Pinsky

### Resources for Living into my Future

The quest for a story is the quest for a life.  
~ Jill Johnston

The best advice seems to be:  
move within all registers of time – present, past, and future –  
and from them draw rich resources for living.  
~ Mary and Ken Gergen

Once life's story has been discovered,  
told and retold with everything in its proper place,  
there is then time to greet the true reasons for living.  
~ Henri Nouwen

Life hangs on a narrative thread.  
This thread is a braid of stories that inform us about  
    who we are,  
    and where we come from,  
    and where we might go.  
The thread is slender but strong:  
we trust it to hold us  
    and allow us to swing over the edge of the known  
    into the future we dream in words.  
~ Christina Baldwin

### My Specific Story/Universal Connections

When one of us tells the truth, he makes it easier for all of us to open our hearts  
to our pain and that of others.”  
~ Mary Pipher

Nothing is as effective in bearing witness,

nothing is as immediate, as memoir.  
When, through the rare alchemy of experiences and artfulness,  
the personal becomes universal,  
there is nothing more powerful.

~ Dave Eggers

My story is important not because it is mine, God knows,  
but because if I tell it anything like right,  
the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours.

~ Frederick Buechner

Human beings can survive and grow through anything  
as long as we can wrap a story around our experience  
that fosters resilience. ...

This is mutual inspiration.

We need to mirror one another's courage.

~ Christina Baldwin

## Generativity

The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope.

~ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

In every family, the greatest legacy is its history.  
Even if every silver spoon, photograph and property deed has vanished,  
the narratives remain.

~ Julie Wheelwright

Whether as a private act or a public act,  
by writing we can howl, sing, or plainly  
and humbly tell what is true.

When it becomes public,  
our howl of outrage can waken the world to injustice.

Our singing writing can waken the world to beauty and to joy.

~ Pat Schneider

## Art, Craft

Good memoirs are a careful act of construction.

~ William Zinsser

The best memoirs, I think, forge their own forms.

~ Annie Dillard

The writer of any work, and particularly any nonfiction work, must decide two crucial points: what to put in and what to leave out.

~ Annie Dillard

Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.

~ Michelangelo

You did then what you knew how to do  
and when you knew better you did better.

~ Maya Angelou

## Craft

Write about small self-contained incidents that are still vivid in your memory. If you remember them it's because they contain a larger truth that your readers will recognize in their lives. Think small and you'll wind up finding the big themes in your family saga (life).

~ William Zinsser

Remember this when you write about your own life. Your biggest stories will often have less to do with their subject than with their significance: not what you did in a certain situation, but how that situation affected you. Walden isn't really a book about how Henry David Thoreau spent his days at Walden Pond. It's about what went through his head for two years at Walden Pond.

~ William Zinsser

So a single image can split open the hard seed of the past,  
and soon memory pours forth from every direction,  
sprouting its vines and flowers up around you  
till the old garden's taken shape in all its fragrant glory.  
Almost unbelievable how much can rush forward to fill an absolute blankness.

Mary Karr

Certain things I remember exactly as they were.  
They are merely discolored a bit by time, like coins in the pocket of a forgotten suit...

The myriad past, it enters us and disappears.  
Except that within it, somewhere, like diamonds,  
exist the fragments that refuse to be consumed.  
Sifting through, if one dares, and collecting them,  
one discovers the true design.

James Salter

An interesting life doesn't make an interesting memoir.  
Only small pieces of life make an interesting memoir.

William Zinsser

The things that matter most in our lives are not fantastic or grand.  
They are moments when we touch one another.

- Jack Kornfield –

In any good memoir, the writer tries to meet the reader where she is  
by offering information in the way it's felt –  
to reflect the writer's inner values and cares  
either in clever linguistic form (like McCourt) or dramatic scene (like Orwell).

~ Mary Karr

The goal of a voice [in memoir] is not to speak with objective authority but with  
subjective curiosity.

~ Mary Karr

The idea is to write it so that people hear it  
and it slides through the brain  
and goes straight to the heart.

~ Maya Angelou

Catch an eyeful, catch an earful, then don't drop what you've caught.

~ William Carlos Williams

## Encouragement for Memoir Writers

I hope you will go out and let stories happen to you,  
and that you will work them,  
water them with your blood and tears and your laughter  
till they bloom, till you yourself burst into bloom.

- Clarissa Pinkola Estes –

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