Chapter 4
Narratives of Emotional Truth

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ABSTRACT

This narrative uses a multigenre format to discuss the writing theory of emotional truth, where writers share truth as they remember it. Factual truth focuses on facts, while emotional truth focuses on the emotions associated with a memory. The example provided uses health coaching, an addition to the medical field that encourages patients to share their stories and set goals for themselves in addition to the goals set for them by their medical team. Fictional elements combine with research in creative nonfiction.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL HORIZONS OF WRITING

As the character of Nick memorably reflects in the novel *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), "so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (p. 180). Retelling our stories through writing helps the writer own them and while memories of stories often pull us back into the past, they don't define our future. This chapter illuminates the value of experiences while simultaneously adding insight into writing theory and practice. The discussion of the writing process can apply to teachers in a classroom as well as patients who want to describe their symptoms to a clinician. While writing typically exists inside the walls of English classrooms, expanding the horizons of how writing becomes implemented leads to innovative interdisciplinary

collaboration. The writing process provides a foundation and a scaffold for narrative inquiry, multigenre writing, emotional truth, and using narrative writing to enhance healing.

MEMORIES OF MARILYN

Winter in Kettering, Ohio was more brutal than usual this year. Marilyn Kepler Bird looked out the window of the hospital at the blizzard. She had been a patient in the hospital for some minor medical tests and felt ready to go home. However, no one was going home in this storm.

Things seemed serious. The hospital employees who had been snowed in at the hospital were on the front lines of dealing with any medical crisis. The doctors and nurses on call were snowed in at their homes and could not travel to the hospital to provide relief. In this era before cell phones, patients couldn't send a quick text home to let loved ones know they were okay. The landline looming on the desk at the nurses' station provided the only lifeline to the outside world. The phone started ringing. No nurses stayed at the station; they needed to be dispatched to various parts of the hospital to help patients. A trained hospital volunteer, Marilyn picked up the phone and reassured the frantic caller his loved one was okay. Marilyn put her hands on her hips, and her green eyes surveyed the chaos around her as she flipped her brown hair over her shoulders. Time to get to work.

During that blizzard week, Marilyn worked more volunteer hours than some of the paid hospital staff. To her, reassuring patients was not a job, but a calling. They needed her, and she was there. Trained as a high school social studies teacher, Marilyn liked teaching but loved health care. She counseled hospital patients scared by their internal medical conditions as well as the external blizzard. Before the medical field had a name for the role she played, she used the skills of listening and inquiry implemented by health coaches.

END NOTES FOR "MEMORIES OF MARILYN"

The previous scene you just read was a work of fiction based on fact. That scene happened before I was born, so of course I did not witness my mom Marilyn helping patients. I heard the story from her when I was a kid, and as

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