

Wintery days were getting longer. Time for New Year's resolutions soon would arrive. This past Fall was the perfect time for me to take a memoirs writing class at Sonoma State. I signed up for Fran Claggett's class with hopes for a renewal of spirit.



My expectations were high. I had taken a memoirs class at Sonoma State seven years ago. I had the itch again. As a retired senior, it is always a pleasure to visit a university campus and see the youthful exuberance of undergraduate students, who seem to get younger each passing year. Staying in touch with the young is a good way to ward off rustiness. I've been attending Sonoma State for years now. I always park at the opposite end of campus from the Cooperage, just to allow myself the stroll past the duck pond and most of the campus buildings. Use it or lose it. The best way to keep mentally fit, is to keep our minds stimulated by learning new things and by continuing to "test" and expand our limits. That includes meeting people, and making friends. I still enjoy crossing paths with interesting minds; that was another expectation, signing up for this course.

My biggest expectation was inspiration for writing about my last four years at a radio station. My hope was that the muse would visit me through the teaching of Fran Claggett. When I first retired I took both a memoirs class and a poetry class from Fran. I became inspired. I actually wrote a few poems, unheard of for me. I'm an engineer, U of Arizona, '61 Math. After Fran's classes, I did write my memoirs, hundreds of stories. I'm done with those, from birth to retirement. But wait, I kept growing, learning, and experiencing, life, love, and the pursuit of happiness. I hoped that being in another of Fran's classes would give me the kick-start to add another chapter to my memoirs.

My expectations were exceeded on all scores. I didn't miss a class. I had my walks and even stayed on campus for lunch every visit. The class of about forty fellow EE students was a perfect size. I moved around the room, sitting in a different location each session, and got to know most of them. Most important, I was moved to write a page or two each session. Fran Claggett has a sort of magic fairy dust that seems to permeate the room. It's like a subtle perfume that creates an undertone that you can't quite place, but it definitely sets a mood. Generally it was just a matter of tying together the ideas that she scattered about with my recent memory of the radio station experiences. These wound up being good pieces.

The takeaways from this class were significant. We had a post-term, unofficial class party in the same Cooperage classroom, on our normal class day. The turnout was about thirty of the forty – that's amazing. The point being that this group of people had developed, in a short eight-week period, a camaraderie that transcended the institutional enroll and attend structure of school life. We also talked about pulling together a continuing writing group from the class members.

Another takeaway, that was probably a great part of the obvious satisfaction that most students felt, was definite growth as writers: through the practice of giving and receiving critiques; through repeated revision of one's writing; and through the inherent preparatory practice and fine-tuning prior to a public reading.

Looking forward to next term, Peter Andrews