Fitz’s Personal Memoir Rubric

We all have people, places or things in our lives that are really important to us.  A "Memoir" is a story we tell about that person, place or thing.

The person could be a friend, a grandparent or parent, brother or sister, or aunt or uncle—anybody whom you know well and who helps you feel special and loved, or who has helped you through a hard time in life, or who is inspired and inspiring.

The place could be a vacation spot, a room in the house, a treefort in the backyard, or any place that you remember fondly and vividly as being different and special.

A thing could be a pet, a toy, a book, a gift or any “thing” that also has that special effect on you that makes “it” worth remembering.

There are many ways to write memoirs, but here is a simple and straightforward rubric to help you write a prose memoir quickly, and, with a bit of thought, effectively and poignantly.

**1. Assignment Information:**

* + It is always wise to format a writing piece exactly as your editor or teacher requires, so be sure that your final piece is presented in the proper style and format.

John Fitz

Essay Writing

Mr. Mean's Class

3/30/2014

**2. Catchy Title**

* + Your title and quote should help to attract readers and set the tone and style of the memoir you create.
  + The quote can be a quote from another person or piece of literature—or it can be a direct quote from the person you are writing about!

[Put Title Here]

**3. Relavant & Meaningful Quote:**

* + A good quote helps to set the tone and direction—and it serves to reinforce the major theme of a writing piece and prepares the reader for what is coming.
  + If you don’t have a quote in your head (and most of us don’t) simply think of a one-word quality of your person place or thing and find a quote online.
  + Put your Quote in italics (no quotation marks are need) beneath your title.
  + Be sure to note your source beneath the quote without italics.

*[Put quote here]*

*[—*Author*]*

**4. Opening Paragraph**

***Set the Scene & State the Theme***

* + In this opening paragraph, start with a scene which describes you doing something memorable with your memoir person (or what you are doing in your “place” or or with your “thing”).
  + Describe everything about that scene using specific images and actions to “paint” a scene in reader’s imagination.
  + End this paragraph by writing the one special attribute that you like most about that person, place or thing.  That “thing” becomes the "theme" of your memoir.

[Put your text here]

**5. First Body Paragraph**

***Say What You Mean***

* + In your first body paragraph write about why this person, place or thing is important to you.
  + Tell us your thoughts and feelings, and describe the specific "actions" this makes this memory so special.
  + Try and write at least five sentences--more if you can write more. Use my Narrative Paragraph Rubric if it helps to keep you on target.

[Put your text here]

**6. Additional Body Paragraphs**

* + There is no reason why you can't add more paragraphs in here as there must be a bigger and more complete story to tell. Generally speaking, the more you write, the more you care!
  + Remember when adding dialogue to create new paragraphs whenever a new person is speaking.

[Put additional paragraphs here]

**7. Concluding Paragraph**

***Finish It Clean***

* + Start your last paragraph by telling us why everyone should have a person like your memoir person in his or her life.
  + End the paragraph with one short sentence that" captures" why your person, place or thing is so great—and maybe even use an exclamation point at the end. For example: "Uncle Tony is the coolest guy in the whole world!”

[Put concluding paragraph here]

8. Copy and Paste Complete Memoir:

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***THE POTSAID RULE OF THREE***

**Proofread, Edit, Revise, & Submit**

* Literature is abandoned, not finished! Go back and re-read what you have written.
* Find three areas or sentences that you can make better. If you can't or won't do this, then you are light years away from being a writer.
* **Often you can find a better broad or narrow theme sentence somewhere else in the paragraph**. You can almost always find a more clear and effective way to write a sentence than you wrote on your first try.
* If the rule of three was too easy (meaning you easily found mistakes) do it again...and again if you have to.

\*When you are convinced you have done all you can, submit your final review as required by your teacher or editor.

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Memoir Assignment

3/30/2014

When Cool Was Really Cool

*Life is not counted by the amount of breaths we take,   
but of the moments that leave us breathless.*

~Unknown

            We were coming home from church one morning and Jimmy Glennon pulled up beside us as we approached the Sudbury road lights. He didn't notice the well-dressed family of eight scrunched into our old Pontiac station wagon as he revved the engine of his yellow and black mustang fastback. I was crammed in the rearward facing back seat doling out peace signs and air horn salutes, but the scene unfolding in front of me was one of the coolest scenes ever: here was the guy Patty had a date with the night before seeming to challenge my father to a drag race, or at the very least humiliate, the infamous and fiery EJ—on a Sunday morning no less. When the light turned green, Jimmy pulled away in a squeal of burning rubber and glorious smoke, fishtailing his car as he laid down a patch—a testament etched like black marker into the road, and which would last  several more months of my bragging to my friends that I had the coolest big sister in town, and I would retell that story to every new kid who sat next to me on the bus as we drove by that spot every weekday on the way to the Peabody Middle School.

That moment sealed it for me: I really did have the coolest big sister in town—and now I could prove it in the hardscrabble myth-making of a crowded kid-filled neighborhood. I could now glow in the reflected light of her infinite coolness, and I still live in that light, but it is now deeper, richer, and more penetrating, with a lingering and haunting pain that still leaves me numb and lonely; but, through Patty we can all be cool; we can live with a richer understanding of our dreams, our struggles, and our potential to embrace the scope of the day, and we can simply share the patchwork mosaic that she wove with the divergent strands of our lives.

When I was young, Patty lived in another age. She moved as a phantom through the house because she was like eighteen when I was eleven; she had friends who would hoist me to the top of the basketball hoop bolted above the garage door; she had friends who played guitars in the basement and pierced each other's ears, and she had friends in prison and friends who died in the Vietnam war, and she had friends that she kept for all of her shortened life—most of whom are here today. My other sisters were never as cool as Patty. Eileen, in her quest for perfection, would charge me a quarter if I didn't make my bed right; Mary Ellen would lament that I was embarrassing the whole family because of my bad pitching in little league, and Annie, who was almost as young as Patty was old, was too little to be cool and did things like take our meal orders before supper on a stolen Friendlies waitress pad. My little brother Tom never seemed to feel the need to be cool.

So it all fell on me.

I really wanted to be cool. I wanted a different and clear slant on life like Patty, but I certainly did not want to work as hard as her; so, like so many other people, I used her as my mentor—my guide through the vagaries and vicissitudes of life.  And she guided me well: she had a way of making your little adventure or undertaking be one of immense importance, but, equally important, she would put her life into your venture by helping to make it become real.  She knew that anything worth trying was worth doing, and so any dream could be pounded into reality; any project could be finished, and any problem or struggle had a way through, and her hand was always there to help it happen.

Patty gave me faith in all that is infinite and eternal because that was the nature and source of her energy.  Need a book typeset? Just drop it off. Need a sweater? Just drop a hint. How about a party or a place to stay? A weekend at the cape? A babysitter for the weekend? How about a car? Patty would hand down her cars like other people would their sweatshirts.  Patty had that rare thing: a wisdom that was not proud of itself and a door that was always open.

The more you knew Patty, the richer you would become. The best part of going to U-Mass was the chance to live near Patty. I mistakenly thought that living near Patty would put us on equal footing. It was there where I lived, not only in the light of her coolness, but in light of her kitchen, where I would show up on a regular basis with a regular stream of spiritually and physically hungry friends, all of whom found that cool as she was, Patty was also warm and magnanimous beyond compare. It was in her kitchen where I first got to hang out with her as a friend, confidant, and cheerleader. My first night at U-Mass, we met for beer down at The Drake, a classic dive of a bar with smoke and pool tables and peanut strewn floors. It seemed strange and normal to be sitting down with her and Donald—her avowed Marxist, long-haired, archaeologist boyfriend who complimented her so perfectly and would soon become her perfect husband and partner and soul-mate until death parted their life together.

It may seem dumb, but it was like a first date for me.  But, it was better than Jimmy Glennon burning rubber at the route two lights; it was better than her taking off with Tubby in an old Triumph Spitfire—and Mary and EJ panicked that she was eloping—with a Jewish boy at that.  Better than when her and Mary Ellen got caught pinning up their catholic school skirts at the bus-stop; better than when one of her friends escaped from prison; better than hearing that her dorm in Southwest was the target of another drug raid; better than when her and a couple of friends hopped in the back of an old bakery truck and moved to Oregon—and EJ making me promise not to tell her mother that it wasn't a real bus. It was better because it was finally real and not just my vision of some more exciting reality.  We were in a smoky bar and laughing and talking and telling stories, and she was with a guy who made her laugh and made her incredibly happy. I could feel her knitting together the best fibers of our family and creating a tapestry that nothing can undo—a tapestry that has stood the test of time.

Patty showed that small gestures are huge, and that huge actions are always doable. She would call and be as excited about her student Rodney's wrestling match as she would winning teacher of the year. She would drive five hours to have dinner with my mother, or to bring a swimming list to Alba, or to drop off a present for one of your kids. She showed how simple it is for giving to be a gift for everyone involved.

In the perfect memory of love, Patty will always live on. And we will always be amazed, humbled, and for me, sometimes simply awestruck ... and breathless.