Event title: Memoir as Detective Novel: Writing the Investigative Memoir

Event description: In this session, five memoirists who built their stories around questions, writing into mysteries in their own lives or their families', will discuss the particular craft challenges that come up when writing a memoir that reads like a detective novel—with readers following along on a search for truth, clarity, or closure: from finding clues and remaining open to surprise, to the practical concerns of research, to how to write into questions with no definitive answers.

Event category: Nonfiction craft and criticism

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A few reminders before we begin:
• For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, (identify moderator), know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
• Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers. • Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
• Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
• Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

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Moderator: Lilly Dancyger is the author of First Love, a collection of personal and critical essays on female friendship forthcoming from The Dial Press in May; and Negative Space, a reported and illustrated memoir about art, addiction, and inheritance; and editor of Burn It Down, a critically-acclaimed anthology of essays on women's anger.

Panelists:

Jeannie Vanasco is the author of *Things We Didn't Talk About When I Was a Girl* (Tin House, 2019) and *The Glass Eye* (Tin House, 2017). Her third memoir, *A Silent Treatment*, is forthcoming from Tin House. She is an associate professor of English at Towson University.

Carmen Rita Wong is the author of “*Why Didn’t You Tell Me?: A Memoir*”. She is a former TV host, advice columnist, and professor. Carmen was Vice Chair of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and board director at The Moth. Her next book is a biography from Amistad/Harper Collins, coming in 2025.

Leta McCollough Seletzky is a National Endowment for the Arts 2022 Creative Writing Fellow whose work has been featured in The Atlantic; The Washington Post; The New York Times; O, The Oprah Magazine; and elsewhere. A former litigator, she is the author of the memoir *The Kneeling Man* (Counterpoint, 2023), a Library Journal Best Book of 2023.

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Opening remarks:

Each panelist will briefly describe their memoir, including the central question(s) that drive the search narrative forward. (Approx. 3 minutes each.)

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Moderator questions:

What do you think sets “investigative memoir” apart from other forms of memoir?
How did your memoir take shape? Did you set out to write this story and then find the question(s) to organize it around, or did you start with questions and end up writing a book?

Did the questions you were asking change as you wrote the book? How so?

What questions were central to your project, but could not be answered? How did you handle those?

Did the story you thought you were telling change as you uncovered new information? What did that look like in a practical sense, for your writing and revising process?

How did the investigative aspect of your memoir inform the narrative structure?

What did the actual research/investigation process look like for you? What methods did you use, how did you organize your research?

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10-15 minutes for audience questions.