

Eight Tips for Tiny Truths—Expert tips on writing micro-memoir

By Beth Ann Fennelly

November 6, 2018 | The Writer | writemag.com

Having practiced the micro-memoir form for a bit now, I'd like to offer some thoughts.

Micro-memoirs...

...Need titles that do heavy lifting. Titles have more impact in short pieces, simply because they take up a bigger percentage of the word count. Further, we've all had the experience of being halfway through a novel or memoir and realizing we've forgotten the title; when a piece is bite-sized, the title lingers like an aftertaste during your entire reading experience. **Let it contribute to your meaning-making.**

...Can make great use of humor, because pieces tend to be trimmed of excess exposition, and so their bones are more visible. What other form features elements stripped of all but the necessary details? The joke. Like jokes, micro-memoirs succeed or fail based on timing; timing, which is created through the amount and order of information in balance with silence. **Note that while micro-memoirs can be humorous, they need to be more than a joke. They need to deepen, not cheapen, upon re-reading.**

...Make writing more like play, because micro-memoirs privilege discovery. They can be more like found poems in this way; **you arrive at them instead of whittling away at them.**

...Teach compression, a valuable, transferable skill. **Writing tiny helps us** when we return to the sprawl of longer forms, because we're better able to recognize filler or description that doesn't serve the narrative.

...Invite risk taking because they have low stakes. They liberate us from the pressure to produce something great, and therefore might trick us into producing something great. Feeling blocked? Challenge yourself to write 60 one-sentence memoirs in an hour. Maybe 59 are garbage. Who cares? That 60th is a keeper.

...Encourage tonal variation. While individual pieces are so short that they might only allow the expression of one nuance of the human register, **they can vary widely in tone** from one to another. **Challenge yourself to embrace the full range of human emotions.** Write some that are wistful, some wry, some poetic, some acerbic, some deliberately flat.

...Provide a home for certain ideas, voices, or music that would be tiresome in anything longer. Also, because they're cushioned by white space, they can be intensely musical or

conceptually demanding or deliberately shocking. It's not inconsiderate to exhaust the reader if you provide a rest.

...Change the shape of your thinking. If you want to change your writing, change the size of your ideas. **Enter the restriction of the small true story** (essay written on a fortune cookie, a matchbox, a postcard) the way you'd enter a dollhouse: imaginatively, alive to the possibilities unlocked by radically shifting scale. Then, when you return to the bigger world, you see its expansive possibilities freshly.