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Family Trouble

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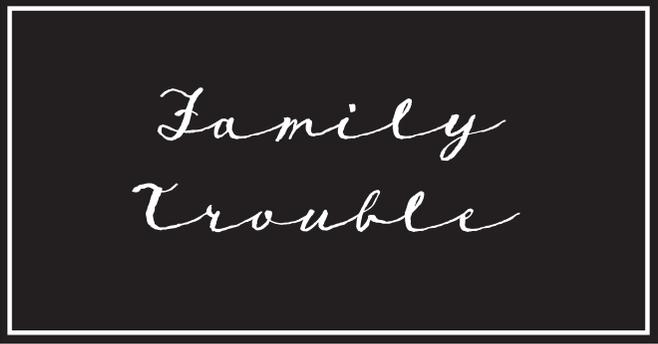
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*Family
Trouble*

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*Family
Trouble*

Memoirists on the
Hazards and Rewards of
Revealing Family

Edited and with an introduction by

JOY CASTRO

University of Nebraska Press
Lincoln and London

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Introduction

Mapping Hope

JOY CASTRO

Writers of all genres wrestle with the challenges, obligations, and consequences of including autobiographical material in their work. Which material is legitimately theirs to include, and whose stories should be discreetly omitted? How do their friends and families react when the work appears in print, on stage, or on screen? William Faulkner famously expressed his own notion of the artist's obligation to others in a 1956 interview in *Paris Review*: "The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. . . . If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is worth any number of old ladies." When writing about family, where do writers draw the line? Do they rob their mothers, partners, children? Is *rob* the correct word for what they do?

For writers who publish memoir, these dilemmas are particularly acute, and memoir is the genre of our era. As James Atlas announced in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1996, "The Age of the Literary Memoir Is Now." Whole conferences and journals now focus on life-writing, scholarly books explore the memoir boom, and in creative writing programs everywhere, students eagerly practice the form. The world's largest scholarly organization devoted to the study of literature, the Modern Language Association, signaled its recognition of life-writing by dedicating its 2011 convention to the theme "Narrating Lives."

As the self-disclosing genre of our reality-hungry era, memoir offers few layers between the writer's private life and the words on the

page. In her essay “The Bad Asian Daughter,” Bich Minh Nguyen acknowledges the fact that “nonfiction has no cloak of make-believe to hide behind, no semantic scrim between narrator and author, speaker and author.” By contrast, other genres provide their authors more cover: false names, new settings, a different ending to the story. “In fiction,” observes Ariel Gore in her essay “The Part I Can’t Tell You,” “there are certain prices we do not have to pay.” Memoir offers little such latitude.

When publishing memoir, writers pay the price of transparency, and the cost can become particularly dear when they write about family. With family stories, the stakes are always high, and there are choices both ethical and practical to be made at every stage. During drafting, writers make multiple determinations about which material is theirs to explore and which should be respectfully left out. Whose stories, intersecting with their own, constitute legitimate territory, and whose would be gratuitous to make public? If writers choose to include family material, do they retain their relatives’ actual names, occupations, and other identifying information for the sake of transparency, or omit or alter such markers to protect privacy? How and when do writers inform their families that they’re working on memoir projects? During revision, memoirists have the option of inviting feedback from family members. If they decide to invite input, how do they respect others’ views yet set boundaries that preserve the integrity of their own vision? After publication, how do writers handle their families’ reactions?

The *New York Times* devoted the piece “A Mother’s Memoir, A Son’s Anguish” to precisely this problem. “Are there limits to writing about loved ones, particularly one’s children?” asks Julie Myerson, author of a controversial memoir about her son’s drug addiction. David Sheff, whose memoir *Beautiful Boy* also explores a child’s drug addiction, feels that “the imperative to protect a loved one, particularly a child, outweighs the responsibility to tell the truth”; Susan Cheever, memoirist and daughter of the autobiographical novelist John Cheever, disagrees. “I strongly believe everybody has the right to their own story,” Cheever says, defining one’s material as inclusive of the inter-

secting stories of family members: Cheever tried to bribe her five-year-old and twelve-year-old to get their approval to write about them. Weighing loved ones' privacy against the impulse to tell the desired story, writers draw different, difficult lines.

The writers included here in *Family Trouble* speak from a diverse range of perspectives as they explore ethical dilemmas, explain their practical strategies for each step of the writing and publishing process, and examine the barriers—internal and external—against writing about family. All of them have published work about family members; all have dealt with the consequences. They offer readers the sweet and bitter fruits of their experience.

The essays gathered here address memoirs about a marvelously wide range of family concerns, many of which have been viewed during past eras as illicit secrets. Adoption, for example, as both the rupture of family and the attempt to form family anew, is a key issue in essays by Susan Olding, Ralph Savarese, Susan Ito, and Karen Salyer McElmurray. Sexuality—particularly sexuality that refuses to fit neatly into the container of heterosexual marriage—forms another focus, as in Aaron Raz Link's "Things We Don't Talk About," about the process of writing *What Becomes You* (2008), the memoir of his sex change. Essays by Ariel Gore, Alison Bechdel, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Sandra Scofield search for answers and narrative strategies in the wake of a family member's death, while Paul Austin and Ralph Savarese investigate the limits of parental responsibility in writing about children with disabilities. Other essays explore mental illness, abuse, neglect, and parental failures to provide and protect. Tackling these complicated and delicate issues, the writers articulate strong views on all sides.

Ethical consensus does not emerge. Some essays provide useful principles about where to draw lines, while others share painful cautionary tales. The pieces are funny, blistering, rugged, smart, generous, and warm by turns. All focus on the vexed dilemmas of including family members' stories in memoir—or, as Jill Christman puts it, "How will I know what is too private? How will I know when enough is enough?"

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems, Faulkner's dictum does not hold. While Jill Christman and Alison Bechdel employ Faulkner's line about "any number of old ladies" as a touchstone, the writers in this collection share little of Faulkner's studied ruthlessness. Rather, their essays explore a clear recognition of responsibility toward loved ones—even a sense of moral anguish. In "Sally Could Delete Whatever She Wanted," emergency-room physician Paul Austin envisions his grown children decades from now, visiting him in retirement, where a copy of his ER memoir *Something for the Pain* (2008) sits on his bookshelf. "If they notice the book at all," he reflects, "I hope they will forgive the flaws in the way I've told our story. But in a deeper, more vital way, I hope they'll forgive my failings as a father." Stephanie Elizondo Griest "would rather pirouette off a bridge than hurt [her] parents in any way," as she confides in "The Seed Book." The memoirists in *Family Trouble* take their ethical responsibilities seriously. In "Like Rain on Dust," Richard Hoffman explains the challenge: "A memoir is not what happened, it is a representation of what happened. The hyphen I've placed in that word represents all the literary skill and all the honesty and judgment that goes into writing a truthful book." These essays demonstrate that we can create honest, probing literary memoir while treating family concerns with care. "I am responsible," writes Jill Christman, "to more than art."

Indeed, rather than being careless about the bonds and obligations of family, these writers share an acute sensitivity to what family *should* and *can* be. When that vision of love and nurture goes awry, they feel compelled to write it, to right it. What family could have, should have been haunts them. As memoirists of family, these writers are pulled taut between the impulse to critique and the equally powerful impulse to empathize, understand, and forgive.

Family Trouble focuses on ethical choices and craft decisions, not legal concerns, since laws vary from place to place, change over time, and are subject to interpretation. These generous essayists, rather, share both their ethical deliberations and the practical strategies they employed at each step of the writing process, from drafting to post-

publication. Neither prescriptive nor directive, the essays draw different boundaries and come to different conclusions. While Ralph Savarese's piece "I Might Be Famous" painstakingly unravels the many decisions he made as he shared his family's story with the world—on CNN, *Newsweek*, NPR, and ABC's *Nightly News*—he ends by saying candidly that he has "come to no definitive conclusions about what I did or what other writers should do." These writers simply dare "to enter," in the words of Aaron Raz Link, "the zones of tension that surround family stories," and to share what they've learned.

The essays also offer a series of clear, practical strategies for writers. Paul Austin asked not only his wife but also a family therapist to read his ER memoir "as an advocate" for his three children, while Ralph Savarese gave his son "the power to veto" the publication of *Reasonable People: A Memoir of Autism and Adoption* (2007). Bich Minh Nguyen let her sister read *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* (2007) in manuscript form; Allison Hedge Coke shared chapter drafts with her parents, sister, and son and invited their input; and Robin Hemley read his memoir aloud to his writer-mother, who suffered from glaucoma and macular degeneration. Aaron Raz Link shared his coauthored manuscript with family members before publication, explaining, "It seemed fair to give them the chance to offer their responses while our options for revision were still open." He and Ralph Savarese discuss their memoirs' innovations with sharing narrative control at the level of point of view: *What Becomes You*, Raz Link's memoir of his sex change, was coauthored with his mother, poet Hilda Raz, and Savarese's memoir *Reasonable People: A Memoir of Autism and Adoption* includes a final chapter that was written by his autistic son.

Many of the writers included in *Family Trouble* teach creative writing at universities and colleges and participate in the various professional activities of writers, and they offer here the fruits of those experiences. Several, including Robin Hemley, Dinty W. Moore, Mimi Schwartz, Sandra Scofield, Heather Sellers, and Sue William Silverman, have published noted creative writing texts for use in the college classroom. Jill Christman shares with readers the same suggestions she gives to her writing students, Ariel Gore explores the connection

she feels to her students' eagerness and uncertainty, and Bich Minh Nguyen reflects upon her experience as a teacher of memoir. The writers in *Family Trouble* also share the common rhetorical situation of giving public readings. In "Mama's Voices," Susan Olding worries over reading an essay about her daughter publicly, concerned that it's "too revealing, too raw." Ruth Behar pulls no punches about the pain of family estrangement caused by her work in "The Day I Cried at Starbucks," and Lorraine López explores in "Calling Back" the celebration and fallout that occurred when her large extended family in New Mexico unexpectedly obtained copies of her first book and attended her reading en masse.

Numerous prohibitions and inhibitions discourage people from writing about their families, and the writers in this collection address those varied barriers. "We write, of course, against the tide of silence," explains Bich Minh Nguyen, "the same one that pushes people to say: *I'm not going to write about this until everyone else is gone.*" Often, the prohibitions come from within our own ranks, from other writers, from writing teachers and fellow learners. Workshopping material about her difficult, violent daughter at a writers' conference, Susan Olding faced classmates' explicit judgments: "*You'll ruin your daughter's life. . . . It's wrong to write about a child. . . . If you must write this, put it in a drawer.*" Aaron Raz Link, too, was affected by advice received at writers' conferences. At one, he "listened to a teacher define bad nonfiction as 'stories about blood relatives and body parts'"—the very focus of his book—and at another, he "heard wise and well-known writers speak of the need to respect silence, to acknowledge the importance of both social boundaries and personal shame."

Social boundaries and personal shame can be intensified by specific ethnic and cultural prohibitions against putting family business out in the street. Bich Minh Nguyen calls memoir "an American form, not an Asian one" and explores the additional burden carried by writers of "ethnic" memoir, whose life stories are always read by the dominant culture as representing not just the family but the whole subculture. In "Memory Lessons," Rigoberto González describes facing the barrier of having "few models within the Latino literary land-

scape to learn from,” and explores what he sees as the Latino/a writer’s “inability to truly and without censorship air out the dirtiest items in the laundry basket. It’s a cultural expectation: keep it within the walls of the home, honor the privacy of the living, respect the secrets of the dead.” Such cultural prohibitions can have a silencing impact, and these essays discuss the courage needed to write one’s way into essential family material. They offer encouragement, inspiration, and the reasons to persist.

For all writers of memoir, motivation is key. Ethical memoirists write in order to see, to understand, to come to terms with wounds. In “The True Story,” Karen Salyer McElmurray concludes: “I can only say this: I wrote my life, page after page. Most importantly of all, I wrote about my family with the possibility of forgiveness.”

In writing my own memoir, *The Truth Book* (2005), I knew far more about my family’s private lives than I included. Two fundamental questions drove the writing of the book, urgent questions that baffled and hurt me: Why had my father killed himself? And why would a perfect stranger say that I had no personality? My hunch was that the two problems were inextricably linked, involving issues of self-erasure due to trauma. Yet when I began to draft, I couldn’t be sure that my explorations of the past would end in illumination. “Good writing must do two things,” contends Vivian Gornick in *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* (2001). “It must be alive on the page, and it must persuade the reader that the writer is on a voyage of discovery.” Writing *The Truth Book*, I truly was on a genuine voyage of discovery, and these two driving questions helped shape the memoir, guiding my choices about what to disclose and what to omit. If an incident, detail, or family story contributed in some way to the answering of one or both of those questions, then it went onto the page. If it didn’t, I didn’t even draft it. Thus, I left out material about my stepmother’s difficult childhood and early first marriage, since it shed no light on either question. Similarly, while my own early first marriage certainly included elements of high drama, writing about my ex-husband would have lent little insight to the book’s

fundamental search. My son Grey, who figures intermittently in the narrative, was included only when he played a role in some turning point in the action or pivotal realization; *The Truth Book* features no adorable anecdotes, though his childhood included many. Likewise, though my husband has said and done many interesting, memorable things during our years together, I confined my descriptions of him only to those moments that bore directly on my search for understanding.

While this is partly a matter of respect for loved ones' privacy, it also stems from self-interest. Having worked so hard to build a happy family, I wanted to keep it, and people generally don't enjoy living with someone who is taking notes, viewing them as fodder. In "Calling Back," Lorraine López recalls the moment when "my youngest cousin, Juanita, regarded me in silence for a long moment before asking, 'All along, were you thinking like *that*? Were you thinking like a writer?'"

The essays in *Family Trouble* provide valuable cautionary tales, wrestling with doubt and illuminating those moments when excluding family material may actually be the best choice. Jill Christman, whose stepmother's "history of mental illness was so complicated, and sad," shares her decision "to leave her out of the memoir entirely." Paul Austin confesses his concerns about his daughter, who has Down syndrome, acknowledging that "there are passages in the book that would hurt her, if she could read them. Should I have left those passages out?" Rigoberto González highlights the dangers of "overthinking . . . overanalyzing . . . overscrutinizing" family memories "beneath the microscope of curiosity," and Sandra Scofield, the author of one published memoir, describes a moment when, faced with a trove of new family materials, she decided not to write another one. In her essay "Done with Grief: The Memoirist's Illusion," she dispels the hope that writing memoir will always function as catharsis.

The essays deal frankly with the risks and potential losses inherent in publishing about family. It's true that not everyone responds well. Ariel Gore's mother "read each inky page as betrayal," and Susan Ito describes how her birthmother, angry about her writing, stopped

communicating with her for six years. In “At Its Center,” Paul Lisicky copes with his aunt’s ongoing outrage at being cast as a minor character—of having her complicated, demanding life reduced to an anecdote, however affectionately drawn—in his own memoir of growing up. In “Writing the Black Family Home,” Faith Adiele bluntly analyzes the dynamic: “If you can’t agree on an account of what happened last Thanksgiving, how could you ever agree on a version of your entire childhood? There are precautions you can take, concessions you can make, but ultimately you’ve demonstrated a power your family doesn’t have. Be prepared to lose them.” Lorraine López writes of the time her cousin “called me in Nashville and hung up on me. Twice. ‘How could you?’ she kept saying. ‘How could you?’”

My own family’s reactions were as multiple and varied as their personalities, their actions, and their stakes in maintaining the silence that had obscured our shared past for so long. Our stepmother, whose portrait in the book is mixed, surprised me by responding positively. Having once trained as a painter, she valued art for its own sake, and after *The Truth Book*’s publication, she sent me a congratulatory letter, praising the fact that I had managed to make art out of all the chaos. She then slipped permanently from our lives. By contrast, the response of the adoptive mother who raised me—who features largely in the book and had already rejected me for not sharing her religious beliefs as a Jehovah’s Witness—was more predictable. When notified about the book’s impending publication, she sent only a brief email: “I can’t deal with you right now.” Several years later, she still hasn’t. To my knowledge, she hasn’t read the book—which is sad, because writing it helped me understand the difficult situation she’d faced and increased my compassion for her destructive choices. While publishing my story cost me that relationship definitively, it wasn’t a relationship I’d really had in the first place. Her sister, though, has since read it and reached out to me, as have my other aunts and cousins. My birthmother surprised me by reacting not to the story of her attempt to abort me, but to the description of her hair. “It was a *perm*,” she said, perturbed. Perhaps some things are too big, too painful, to discuss. My biological father, a lifelong alcohol abuser, reacted

with drunken outrage at the minimal role he played in the text, though his actual part in my life had been no bigger.

The only member of my family of origin with whom I shared the manuscript before it went into production was my cherished younger brother, both because he was the only person from that time whose love I still enjoyed, and because the book represents him at his most painfully vulnerable—as a starved, abused, neglected child—and I felt he deserved to share control. As a girl, I had sometimes managed to protect him and sometimes failed. While I wanted to explore my own story, which was inextricably his story as well, I desperately wanted him not to be hurt again, didn't want my work to be a reinscription of old wounds, an unwanted exposure, an exploitation. In the original manuscript, I worked hard to protect his privacy, including leaving his name out of the narrative, referring to him throughout only as “my brother” and “my little brother.” I sent him the electronic file with the *carte-blanc* promise to make any changes he requested.

I dug in to wait, expecting his reading of the manuscript to take a while, since he usually took time to respond, if he responded at all, to anything emotional or relating to our childhood. I was very nervous.

But he printed the manuscript immediately and spent a weekend passing pages back and forth with his girlfriend. When he called back, he wasn't ashamed, wasn't afraid of the exposure. He was proud of what we'd survived, and he felt it was an important story to tell. “You put my name in there,” he said.

While the publication of a family memoir can offer relatives a chance to move, grow, and communicate in new ways, what I've experienced is that people will largely continue to be themselves, just more intensely. Warm alliances will be strengthened; angry people will lash out; relationships that weren't really functional will fall quietly away.

How family members react is not in your hands, I tell my memoir-writing students. What *is* in your hands is the narrative: its fidelity to facts as you recall them, its fair-mindedness, its compassion for the straits in which your family members found themselves, its sincere quest to understand what happened. “Intention matters,” as Jill

Christman writes. Motivation matters, and it affects the integrity of the work you produce. “Do not do this work in order to be seen, to be right,” counsels Heather Sellers. “Do it in order to see.”

Write, I tell my students. You cannot predict what will offend someone, so just write. You can always revise, emend, edit. This lesson is borne out by the essays here: Bich Minh Nguyen calls for “a little ruthlessness” in the original drafting process: “write everything down first; pare away later.” With publication, people may get angry about things written with no intended malice, because their portraits on the page don’t jibe with the images of themselves they cherish. As Paul Lisicky concludes: “The lesson is obvious but simple: we have absolutely no control over how others interpret our work, even when we think we’re writing out of affection.” Jill Christman concurs: “Here is the lesson: when you’re sitting at your desk, recreating the lives of your loved ones on the page for all to see, you cannot anticipate what will rub someone wrong. You think you can, and this inner, anticipatory critic, will hang you up. She will hold you by the ear and squeeze. Shake her off. She doesn’t know. The things she thinks will offend will not offend. The things she can’t even imagine will offend . . . she will let slide unnoticed. Shake her off. Write your story.”

Aaron Raz Link agrees, noting that “the closest I came to a permanent rift with my brother was over the appropriate word to use when describing his residence: ‘townhouse’ or ‘townhome.’” Ruth Behar’s experience with her uncle, who objected to specific words—“tiny,” “rundown,” “godfather”—was similar. Aaron Raz Link’s conclusion about family sensitivities: “You just never know.”

One reward of the difficult work of autobiographical writing is finding clarity and coming to understand the past. In “The Deeper End of the Quarry: Fiction, Nonfiction, and the Family Dilemma,” Dinty W. Moore suggests the importance of such work. “What I believe,” he writes, “is that the straightforward telling of family stories has value. I believe that more people have been harmed over time by secrets and concealment than by candor and revelation.” In “Your Mother Should Know,” Sue William Silverman, whose two memoirs cover both childhood sexual abuse and its long-term impact, concludes, “Now, after

writing my secrets, the weight of life feels lighter. Without the burden of living a double, splintered life, I'm whole." Judith Ortiz Cofer feels that "only by writing" her deceased father's story "would I know how his life narrative has shaped mine." Karen Salyer McElmurray offers her realization: "As I wrote a memoir about family—about my own mother, myself as a mother, about the son I'd surrendered—my depression shifted, and so did the way my story was told. . . . In writing my memoir about family, I began to see how the pieces fit."

In dissolving secrecy and shame, memoirists reach past isolation and toward others. "Communication leads to community," as Jill Christman writes, "and community sustains us." Sometimes this happens quite literally, within writers' own families. Sue William Silverman's extended family, whom she had never known, reconnected with her after reading her first memoir, *Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You* (1996). After the publication of his memoir *Half the House* (1995), Richard Hoffman and his father enjoyed a new closeness, and the publication of *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* led Bich Minh Nguyen's formerly uncommunicative family to acknowledge "the idea that our experiences were worth writing about." She marvels, "My family talks so much when we're together now." For Mimi Schwartz, sharing with her husband the draft of her marriage memoir *Thoughts from a Queen-Sized Bed* (2002) "helped a drifting marriage onto more emotionally solid ground." In one of the most moving incidents in this collection, Lorraine López describes the moment she saw her cousin Molly, from whom she'd been estranged due to the portrait of her in López's first book: "Without thinking, I rose from my seat and crossed the room to embrace her. She hugged me back. 'I can't be mad at you anymore,' she said. 'I was angry for a long time, and then I started writing.' Molly pulled a sheaf of papers from her oversized handbag. 'I always wanted to write, and you made me want to write my side.'"

While family bonds can be strengthened by the publication of memoir, sometimes the building of community occurs on a larger, public scale. Paul Austin hopes that through his disclosure of his own ambivalent feelings about work and fatherhood, some father may

gain comfort, knowing he wasn't the only one. Ariel Gore explains her motivation for disclosing her life and her family in memoir: "I write it because I want to tell you that if your life and your grief feel messy and shameful sometimes, too, that maybe it's not just you—you're like me, and we're everybody."

When I was thirteen in West Virginia, abused and underfed, living in a trailer twelve miles from the nearest town, I didn't know why I drew floor plans of houses—in scraps of free time, on scraps of paper: houses with swimming pools and palm trees, houses with attached stables for my imagined horses, houses where an older boy would visit and fall in love with me. I drew houses of safety, sufficiency, of plenitude and pleasure. I hid them.

When I first read the essays collected here, I learned that Heather Sellers—who grew up through her parents' mental illness and alcohol abuse—also drew house plans as a child. In an early version of her essay, she explains, "I wasn't going to become an architect, ever. I was becoming a self, drafting and organizing a personality. I was mapping a blueprint for hope."

Geographical and architectural metaphors infuse several of these essays, which reflect on the way that memoirs remap domestic space and reconfigure what the structures of *home* and *family* can mean. As Aaron Raz Link points out, "Like architects, writers mark borders separating personal spaces from public ones." Writing about her silenced status as her birthmother's guilty secret, Susan Ito metaphorizes adoption as "Living in Someone Else's Closet."

Memoir politicizes the personal, and the essays in this collection recognize the political work that family narratives accomplish in the wider world. To which nation do we belong? Which family? On which side of the border do we stand? Susan Ito traces her Japanese American birthmother's need for silence and secrecy back to a life shaped by prejudice and World War II-era internment camps. Of her Nigerian Finnish Swedish heritage, Faith Adiele observes, "I am heir to family-group histories that have been at best underrepresented, at worst misrepresented. My job is to wield memoir as the corrective."

While the immediate concerns of memoirists may seem tightly focused, the ultimate ramifications of our work expand well beyond the private sphere. As Bich Minh Nguyen explains, “To tell the stories of family is to break the divide between inside and outside.”

Memoir argues, directly or implicitly, for how the family should be configured: how parents should act, how children should be treated, and how the broader culture should dignify or ignore the rights of its varied and vulnerable citizens—the autistic, the abandoned, the abused, the queer, the dark, the poor. Aaron Raz Link writes: “Before I became a writer, I was a historian working in public museums. As a result, I see that [the concept of] *family* assembles our individual stories together to form larger stories, which are assembled together to become the fabric we call *culture* and *history*. This process gives each of us some sense of belonging to a larger world. The stories themselves provide the explanations we are given for the shapes and meanings of our lives.”

“Memoir . . . is seen as a kind of record,” writes Bich Minh Nguyen. “And to enter into this record-keeping is to assert, audaciously, a point of view.” To reconfigure the family—our most basic, intimate unit of community—is to rebuild the world.

Audacious, yes. Yet also open, curious, willing to invite and hear other versions. In writing about family, memoirists draw others—their family members, the wider world—into the conversation about how to structure relationships. Ralph Savarese, considering issues of perspective, writes, “I delighted in my son’s disagreement; another view had collided with my own, thereby complicating each. We’d usefully staged the problem of point-of-view, as fundamental as it is inescapable.” Rigoberto González acknowledges, “I know that what I write down is simply my version, not the definitive, unchallengeable truth.” Audacious yet humble, assertive yet listening: family memoirists negotiate the tensions of speaking the self while dwelling in relationship. “What we can tell is ours to tell,” writes Aaron Raz Link. “Everything we can’t tell is someone else’s story—someone who may or may not speak, and who may or may not agree with us. We can only leave space in our lives and work for these voices to be heard.”