**You Can’t Make This Stuff Up**

***Mining Family History For a Novel While Saving Good Stuff For Later***

**Or *Great, now I can’t go home for Thanksgiving.***

**Related: Do I Need a Pen Name?**

***Jennifer Longo October 2015***

**I. WRITING WHAT YOU KNOW**

 **\* First time novelists/Ladies get slagged for incorporating their life experience into novels.**

 **\* This is nothing new and all great authors do it. Some lie about it, some don’t. They all do it.**

 **\* Imagination or the lack thereof has nothing to do with this.**

**II. WRITING WHAT YOU LOVE \* THIS IS WERE THE STORY LIVES**

 **\* We all *know* a ton. Not all of it is exciting or novel-worthy; but what we *love* often is.**

 **\* Why do we love what we love? Or obsess over what we obsess?**

 **\* What Is The Story About? (Not what *happens* – what is it *about*?)**

**III. DETAILS**

 **\* Being a ‘Friendly garbage collector’**

 **\* Sifting through what stays and asking *Why?* Do these details serve what the story is about? Should they be saved for another story? (One time I went to Missouri with my grandparents. My agent and editor couldn’t have cared less. 100 pages *gone*.)**

**IV. ASKING PERMISSION/ASKING FORGIVENESS**

 **\* Whose memory is this? Whose life experience? Whose book is this? (Hint: Someone is typing. That’s probably whose book it is. Also? This is NOT about revenge or embarrassing anyone. Be mindful. Be kind.)**

 **\* On the other hand: Anne Lamott.**

 **\* Fiction is not memoir. ‘Creative non-fiction’ is maybe the greatest literary category every invented, for people like me who have eight million stories but also I love to exaggerate and/or add flair because I know how to make the story better. Drama! Details! Texture!**

 **\* Letting people know beforehand. Waiting until the book is published, hoping they won’t remember what they did/said during Christmas of 2014 because the author definitely does. (See above re: revenge/embarrassing people. Not the point.)**

 **\* How close are you to family members whose stories intersect with yours? If things go south, how much does this moment matter to the story?**

 **\* Using pseudonyms absolves an author of any litigation. Still; have a heart. And don’t quote me on that. I’m just telling you what my editor told me.**

**V. GET YOUR MEMORIES STRAIGHT**

 **\* Asking other people who were there can reveal your terrible memory and/or super interesting or annoying ways in which people remember things differently. Or not at all.**

 **\* Journals. Who keeps them and why? (Hint: Jenny did. All her childhood. And it’s pretty obvious why.) There are things in there, single pages or even sentences, that warrant an entire book. Because they tell what the story could be *about*.**

**VI. SIX FEET OVER IT (MOURNING)**

 **\*Cancer**

 **\* Ocean**

 **\*Running**

 **\*Chopping Wood**

 **\*Grave Selling**

 **\* Death and Death and Death.**

 **\* Dario**

 **\* Acceptance of limitations. Soaring past them.**

**VII. UP TO THIS POINTE (ENDURANCE)**

 **\* Resilience \* San Francisco \* Cliff House \* Shackelton \* Scott \* The Race To The Pole \* Ballet**

 **\* Kids \* Giving Up**

 **\* Ballet Has Issues**

 **\* San Francisco / West Portal/ George Sterling/ Ida Coobrith Poems**

 **\* Antarctica**

 **\* Adelie Penguins**

 **\* McMurdo**

 **\* Endurance**

**VIII. THIRD NOVEL UNTITLED (PEACE)**

 **\* Adoption \* People Need To Understand Some Things.**

 **\* Foster Care**

 **\* Mountain Summiting**

 **\* Wilderness Rangering**

 **\* Family Secrets/Withheld Information**

 **\* Racism**

 **\* Japanese Exclusion**

 **\* Listening To Silence. Nature. We Are All Made Of Stardust.**

*At the end of our streets is sunrise;*

*At the end of our streets are spars;*

*At the end of our streets is sunset;*

*At the end of our streets the stars.*