



Hello!

Happy September and welcome to the 2nd revamped newsletter for Writing from Near and Far.

I've been carefully reading the [2020 anthology of Best Women's Travel Writing](#) at the moment to gear up for my [submission for the 2025 edition](#). I want to tell you a few things I'm noticing as I take in all the winning entries that made it into this anthology.

While [Paulette Perhach](#) helpfully wrote about what not to do when submitting to this anthology, I want to focus on what to do. **Here are my top tips:**

1. **Have a quest.** Most of the stories in the 2020 edition (and the other editions as well!) are propelled by the author's quest. Here are a few examples:

- Finding El Saez by Alia Volz is a quest to thank and pay back a Cuban man who helped the author decades ago.
- Tracking a Ghost by Jill K. Robinson is a quest to see a snow leopard in the wild.
- Meeting Joy by Jennifer Baljko is about a small part of a larger quest to walk from Bangkok to Barcelona.
- Making the Rounds by Abbie Kozolchyk is a quest to learn about a food custom in an Andean town.
- A Daughter's Guide to Florence by Audrey Ferber is a quest to feel the presence the author's mother in Florence by recreating a trip she took.
- Good Enough by Anne Sigmon is a quest to climb Mt Kilimanjaro.
- The House on KVR Swamy Road by Sivani Babu is a quest to remember the author's past and understand what has changed.
- A Strange Ambition by Eva Holland is a quest to survive and complete extreme polar training.
- Headlights by Marcia DeSanctis is a quest to find perfect solitude in Mont St Michel in Normandy.

Just from the brief descriptions here, you can see how the quests range from the tangible (learning about a food custom / seeing a snow leopard) to physical (to survive in the Arctic / to climb a mountain) to even deeper still (to reconnect with a dead parent, to remember one's past).

Do you have a quest? How will you make it meaningful to your readers?

2. Many stories focus on looking back to younger travel experiences.

- *Casi Loco* by Anita Cabrera is about the author's memory of a time in her twenties when she exchanged money on the black market.
- *You Don't Have to be Here* by Anne P. Beatty is a story about the author's memory of her Peace Corps experience decades ago.
- *Not a Stranger* by Tania Romanov Amochaev is about a long-forged travel relationship with Bhutan.

Don't be afraid to write about something happened to you a long time ago. Can you drum up a memory of an adventure from your younger years, in your twenties or thirties? You might even want to write about it from your perspective right now, perhaps decades later. How do you see that person back then?

3. Some of the anthologized stories are about a family legacy.

- *The House on KVR Street* is about loss of family memories and legacy through neglect and time's passage.
- *A Family Project* by Faith Adiele is about the author visiting her relatives in Finland for the first time.
- *Stolen Tickets* by Naomi Melati Bishop is about retelling her father's story of travel and commemorating his legacy.
- *Wade in the Water* by Alexandria Scott is about the author's familial and historical connection to the wetlands of Blackwater national Wildlife Refuge near Chesapeake Bay.
- *A Daughter's Guide to Florence* by Audrey Ferber is about the author's relationship with her mother.

Is there a family legacy story you have to tell that involves travel?

4. **Don't be afraid to add humour.** Even though many of these stories are quite serious and poignant, the tone at times is also often light and humorous. Gently disparaging oneself is one tactic, writing about the extreme physical pain and endurance in an exaggerated tone is another.

5. **Many of the stories take place in lesser travelled locations,** such as Bhutan, Chesapeake Bay, the mountains of Nepal, a small Andean town, a street in India.

What unique location have you been to? Unique can mean many things. Think beyond only the special or extraordinary. What was special or extraordinary only to you?

6. **As you would expect, all the stories pay great attention to including sensory images: the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch.**

Whatever personal story you choose to write, don't forget to take us there using sensory details.

Overall, the effect of reading through those 34 entries is reminding me of several things at once.

First, to keep going deeper with my personal story and not be content with a superficial nod to my underlying thoughts and change.

Second, keep a clear track of the personal story throughout the 'in the moment' story.

Finally, as with any experience, there was a lot going on in the story I am writing about. However, through revision I'm **whittling down to the essence of the main personal drama** I'm going through that is triggered by the travel experience I chose to write about.

I hope this is helpful for you in your writing!

I have a few more general writing tips:

1. I'm getting a lot out of Steve Almond's new writing craft book, [Truth is the Arrow](#), [Mercy is the Bow](#). I'm a big fan of Steve Almond's writing and even more so his speaking. I loved listening to him on the Dear Sugar podcast as well as whenever he appears as a guest on other podcasts, like Brad Listi's [Other People podcast](#).

He's so smart and articulate, and that's exactly how he writes about the craft of writing. Be prepared to go deep with this book as Steve Almond is mainly concerned with the human condition rather than anything remotely superficial. And he is able to take deep dives into our very existence and nature while also managing to be laugh out loud funny! I highly recommend this book for any form of writing.

2. Here's something more specific than a book recommendation. What I'm about to recommend might not work for you, but I thought I would **share a specific writing practice of mine that works really well** to push my writing and language in deeper and more specific directions. I take a book that has a lot of unique and precise words in it, particularly verbs, and I write down all those words that I'm impressed by in my notebook. I choose words that I admire but wouldn't normally think to use myself while drafting. When I have a passable draft but want to deepen the language, I turn to this list of words in my notebook and see if I can use any of these words as I revise / rewrite.

Now, your choice of book to do this with might vary here! For me, anything by [Michael Cunningham](#) works really well. I've also more recently used the book [Brown Girls](#) by Daphne Palasi Andreades: beautiful prose! And Truth is the Mercy, Arrow is the Bow is not only providing profound writing and life advice, but also very useful for my collection of words project. 😊

I've had my ear out this month for travel memoirs that have been off my radar until now. These three look very interesting:

[Brave-ish: One Breakup, Six Continents and Feeling Fearless After Fifty by Lisa Never](#) (I'm reading this one at the moment. The concept is so captivating and the smooth writing style means I don't want to put this one down!)

[A Hard Place to Leave by Marcia DeSanctis](#)

[Braver than you Think by Maggie Downs](#)

Finally, Lisa Never is also running a very well structured and affordable course on u-
demy called [Travel Writer 101](#). This course is aimed at teaching you travel writing from
more of a journalistic angle than what I do in my [book](#) and workshops, so if you're
interested in journalistic travel writing, this is an excellent place to start!

And finally:

Writing prompt: Since the most common element in the chosen stories are that they
have a quest, this prompt asks you to name the quest that brought you to a particular
travel experience. Write several paragraphs about why that quest was meaningful to you
to get your started on your story.

Question for you: I'm gearing up for my submission to The Best Women's Travel Writing
anthology (submissions close 30 September). What are you writing about for your
submission?

[Write Your Travel Memoir: A Step-by-Step Guide](#) by Jillian Schedneck

"I loved this book and I learned so much. I wish I'd had this before writing my memoir,
but believe me, I'll use it from here on."

Marilyn Abildskov, author of *The Men in My Country*, Professor, MFA Program in Creative
Writing, Saint Mary's College of California

