

Sharon Atkins

From: The Social Historian <barb=bjstarmans.com@mail179.wdc02.mcdlv.net> on behalf of The Social Historian <barb@bjstarmans.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 5, 2017 8:00 AM
To: ssatkins@gmail.com
Subject: Are you up to the creative nonfiction challenge?

This week, the Social Historian finds out about the [Tynewydd Colliery Flood of 1877](#) and talks about the genre of creative nonfiction. Don't forget to check out the [FREE 101 Social History Writing Prompts](#) download for subscribers today! [View this email in your browser](#)

What is Creative Non-Fiction?

Creative nonfiction is a genre of writing that particularly fascinates the social historian. It combines the **facts of history** with **storytelling** and is written not only to inform, but to entertain the reader. The genre gives us a way to tell our ancestors' stories in a way that will engage our family members and draw them into the lives of generations past.

The creative nonfiction story follows all the rules of fiction. It has a plot with a beginning, a middle and an end. It leads the reader on a journey. But at the same time, the story must also follow all the rules of factual writing. Details, events, places and people are based on what actually happened and must be verifiable. Writing such a story is a little like walking a tightrope. We don't want to lean too far into the creative, or we risk straying from the facts. But at the same time, we don't want to lean too far the other way, or we risk boring the reader by reciting too many dates, names and places.

The trick is to keep our balance as we tell our ancestor's stories.

Plot

The plot of a piece of creative nonfiction follows a true story. But like a novel, it starts with the day that was different, setting up the conflict that is about to happen in our ancestor's life. As the writer, we layer on the incidents and scenes that lead up to the arc of the story, and then hopefully, our conflict is resolved and our characters live happily ever after.

Scene

One of the most challenging aspects of creative nonfiction writing is describing the scenes in which our story takes place. We need to research our ancestor's environment in depth, so that we can lead our reader into actually being there with our ancestor. We need to describe the sights, the sounds and even the smells of the past to paint an accurate picture of the places that our ancestors lived in. The key to setting the scene is exhaustive research into our ancestor's time and place.

Characters

The characters of our stories are, of course, our ancestors. We need to shape their personas based on the facts of their lives but we also need to go below the surface to understand and at least hint at their motivations and feelings as we write about the period in their lives we are narrating.

Sample of Creative Nonfiction

Delhi, India – 6 November 1880

The minister's voice droned on, a low rumble in her ear. Her eyes, red and swollen from weeping since before the dawn's early light, stared sightless while the sun's blistering heat burned the back of her neck. An insect crawled a slow staggering path across her forehead and a bead of sweat ran down her neck, disappearing under the collar of her hastily borrowed black dress. But it was not

until the first shovel of earth rained down on the small pine box that Jessie moved, taking a faltering step forward as if to throw herself into the tiny grave.

Beside her, William stood stoically, the whiskey fumes rolling off him in the torrid November morning. Behind them were a few of the regiment's wives, none of them her friends but neither were they enemies. They too, were just trying to survive this hell that was India.

Challenge Yourself

Are you up for the challenge? Why not give creative nonfiction a try today?

The Social Historian Weekly
101 Writing Prompts
FREE Download!

FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY

Download all of the 101 Social History Writing Prompts to inspire you as you tell
your own ancestors' stories.
