

## AWP 2020 Event Outline

### **EVENT TITLE:** **Betrayed: Writing About Family, Friends, and Loved Ones**

**EVENT DESCRIPTION:** As poets and prose writers, our creative process is complicated by our anticipation of our loved ones' reactions to our work. We risk harming real-life relationships, and may expose ourselves and others to legal liability. How do we address these conflicts in our writing and in our lives, and what choices can we make to protect ourselves, our work, and our loved ones? We'll discuss strategies to mitigate the potential for liability and emotional harm before and after publication.

### **EVENT CATEGORY:** Artistic and Professional Stewardship

#### **Event Organizer and Moderator:**

Helen Fremont, a former public defender, is the author of the national bestseller *After Long Silence* and her new memoir, *The Escape Artist*, exploring family secrets she came to understand after being disowned by her family after her first book. Her work has appeared in *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, *Ploughshares*, *Harvard Review*, *Lilith*, and other publications. She lives with her wife in Boston.

#### **Event Participants:**

Amy Kim is a poet and attorney who works at the University of Virginia School of Law as an assistant dean. Her first book, *Into the Cyclorama*, won the Michael Waters Poetry Prize, and her second, *Eros the Contagion*, won the Washington Prize. She teaches poetry and legal writing in Charlottesville, VA.

Lynette D'Amico's work has appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Ocean State Review* and at *Brevity* and *Slag Glass City*. Her novella *Road Trip* was short-listed for the Paris Literary Prize and the first runner-up of the 2014 Quarterly West Novella Contest.

Lisa Van Orman Hadley is the author of *Irreversible Things*, a semi-autobiographical novel-in-stories. She has received the Larry Levis post-graduate fellowship, A Barbara Deming Memorial Fund grant, and a Millay Colony fellowship. *Irreversible Things* is the winner of the Howling Bird Book Prize.

Lenore Myka is the author of *King of the Gypsies: Stores*. A recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship, her award-winning writing has appeared in a variety of publications and has been selected as distinguished by the *Best American* series.

### **Opening remarks and housekeeping announcements.**

### **Welcome to Betrayed: Writing about Family, Friends, and Loved Ones.**

Thank you all for being here. We know there are a zillion other events going on, so if you need to leave, just try to slip out quietly.

Before we get started, handouts are available at the front. Please pass them around.

We have a lot to cover over the next 75 minutes, and we want to leave at least 10 minutes at the end for your questions, so we'll jump right in.

I'll introduce each of us, and then we'll talk a little bit about our own experience writing about loved ones, and we'll offer suggestions about what you can do to avoid or mitigate the sense of betrayal that we writers inevitably inflict on those closest to us. We'll also offer some basic information on the law – first amendment rights, privacy rights, libel, and so on.

Participant Initial Remarks:

### **Helen Fremont**

I was raised Catholic and discovered in my thirties that my parents were Jewish Holocaust survivors. My first memoir, *After Long Silence*, tells the story of how I found out our true identity, and also pieces together my parents' stories of surviving the Siberian Gulag and the Nazis. After my book became a national bestseller, my family disowned me.

So I have a lot to say about writing lovingly about loved ones, and how treacherous that can be. My new memoir, *The Escape Artist*, was inspired by my family's reaction to my first book, and delves into more family secrets. I'll be talking about my own experiences writing memoir, and offer suggestions on how you can protect yourself and your loved ones from emotional and legal harm.

### **Annie Kim**

Annie will discuss the risks and decisions that went into publishing her second poetry collection, which explores a history of trauma in the family, without her family's knowledge. Drawing on her training as a lawyer, she'll also share a few tips about how to limit one's liability as a writer when writing about real people.

### **Lisa Van Orman Hadley**

I wrote an autobiographical novel-in-stories about my large Mormon family. Although my parents, my siblings, and I are the main characters in the book (I use our actual names), I decided to label the book "fiction." I'll talk about the factors that went into making that choice and will discuss how I handled writing about the murder of a family friend on the side of my house, my father's Alzheimer's, and religion, as well as the tricky aspects of using my mom's journals as source material. Some choices were made intentionally, some weren't, and some were put off until my hand was forced. I'll talk about the point at which I decided to show the book to my immediate family members and their various reactions to it (the reactions seem to fall into two camps—those of us who are the INFJ Myers-Briggs personality type and those of us who are not).

### **Lynette D'Amico**

I love a good story someone else tells me about my life—there's nothing more seductive in fact—but at the end of the day stories that don't contain counter stories are false. When my woman lover and spouse of twenty years told me he was a man, I wanted to tell my version of that story, which I am doing in a series of essays called *Men I Hate*. We had lived as a gay couple. I had identified as a lesbian my entire life. If my husband and I don't say his dead name, or post photos of his past girlhood, what part of his story is mine to tell? Is any of it? Whose story is it anyway? What are the concerns, the questions, and potential consequences when we tell the counter story to our loved ones' stories.

### **Lenore Myka**

Lenore will discuss her transition from a self-described "strictly fiction" writer (and the limitations of these sorts of adopted labels) to nonfiction. She'll consider why it is that nonfiction is on the one hand disparaged for being a natural extension of the self-obsessed society in which we live, and yet is wildly popular among readers and writers. She'll share how she got over shaming "naval-gazing" criticism to discover that nonfiction was ultimately a better, more intuitive artistic approach for her to take.