



## A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

EVERYONE HAS A LIFE STORY, BUT HOW DO YOU TAKE YOUR STORY AND MAKE IT A MEMOIR?

REGIONAL EDITOR JULIA PLATT LEONARD JOINED A WEEKEND WRITING WORKSHOP AT DOUBLE DD RANCH CALLED 'PUTTING THE ME IN MEMOIR WRITING', LED BY TWO LA A-LIST WRITERS TO FIND OUT.



Food by Juicy Foods 505  
Flowers by Mini Falls Farms  
Desserts by Mille French Cafe & Creperie  
Shot on location at Double DD Ranch

Put the ME in memoir? No thanks. Couldn't someone else star in my memoir (perhaps a cross between Audrey and Katharine Hepburn)? Or, at a minimum, could I refer to myself in the very distant third person? Let's be honest, only my mom would want to read my memoir, and she died two years ago. And if she were alive, would I want her finding out what I was *really* up to when I told her I was at Charlotte's house studying for my English final?

The short answer is no. I showed up to the weekend-long memoir workshop hosted by bestselling author Hillary Carlip, and Emmy nominated/Golden Globe winning TV comedy writer, Maxine Lapiduss, shall we say, reluctantly. It didn't help that we were told firmly no talking until directed to do so. Vague thoughts of cults *did* cross my mind.

But – and yes, there is a but – it's hard to be anything other than relaxed and at home at Double DD Ranch. Start with the fact that wife-and-wife team, Lapiduss and Carlip are consummate professionals with resumes in writing and performance that are long and lauded. And in a way, you are at home. Double DD ranch is their property eight miles south of Santa Fe, and the setting for writers' workshops, Sunday salons, retreats, weddings, and gatherings.



## WORKSHOPS



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But why a memoir workshop? It's all about helping us find our authentic voice, says Carlip. "It's an important time to tell our stories, and to share things in our lives that can inspire people and move people and entertain people," she says. In telling our own stories, we strike a universal chord. And that touches both reader and writer. "Just being able to sit down and tell a story can be incredibly healing and revealing at the same time for people," says Lapiduss.

What unfolds is a weekend of writing, talking, and – dare I say it – playing. The other guests were an engaging and uber talented group from every walk of life. There was the story of a youth fuelled by a predilection for starting fires. There was the church acolyte who buckled to the bully, stole the communion wine, and drank the evidence. Everything from stories of harrowing childhoods to learning how to drive in Mississippi.

By day two, I was comfortable enough to let the group know that I hated that day's opening exercise. In saying so, I felt I was channelling my inner two-year old, and it felt good. Like the therapists you wish you had had, Lapiduss and Carlip create a safe environment where we could explore challenging issues and emerge with our hearts opened, sometimes broken, but always healed. Boxes of tissues made the rounds.

"I think right now in the world, so many of us don't feel seen and heard," says Lapiduss. "And we feel like we have

to fight for everything we're doing, whether it's in our career, or our family, or to be heard. It's so wonderful to release that stress of it all and just have people find out and reveal something that they might not have even known."

Frequent breaks to stretch legs and continue conversations, enriched with lovely lunches created by Juicy Foods 505, replenished us in every sense of the word. The setting didn't hurt. Double DD Ranch is nestled within 27 acres of land, under the totemic presence of Lone Butte, so you can't help but feel a sense of space and freedom that eases even the weariest soul. We ended Sunday evening gathered round the fire pit, sipping cocktails, and furthering friendships, amazed that in one weekend, something had shifted for all of us.

The buzz continued as Hillary – author of five books including her memoir *Queen of the Oddballs: And Other True Stories from a Life Unaccording to Plan* – provided follow-up one-on-one sessions to offer her critique (always gentle and always on target) on pieces we'd written over the weekend. If you're a writer, this workshop is a must. If you're not, it's still a must. Lapiduss and Carlip remind us that we're all creative and have a story to tell.



# THAT TIME I PRETENDED TO BE SWEDISH

BY CYNDY TANNER



I don't make left hand turns, I have never parallel parked and, I assure you, I've never won an award for safe driving.

My driving record is, in a word, sketchy. I was 27 before I took my driver's test, while living in Oxford, Mississippi with my then boyfriend and future husband, while he attended his first and what turned out to be his last year of law school at the University of Mississippi. "Ole Miss," which I immediately dubbed "Ole Mistake."

There I was, uprooted for love and living in a place where towels took three days to dry and the steel pole in the closet leaked steady droplets of rust-colored water onto our hanging clothes. I asked myself daily, "Have I moved to Andy Griffith's Mayberry?"

One morning, looking out my back kitchen screen door, I saw an elderly black man skinning a squirrel and it hit me. It was time to get my driver's license.

How'd I get to be 27 years old and never learned to drive anyway? In high school, when most everyone was fairly obsessed with getting their driver's license as soon as they were legal, and some people, like Cissy Levine, got a brand-new powder blue Saab just for turning sixteen, I didn't have the money to take Driver's Education nor was there a family car for me to practice with. Thankfully some of my rich friends already had their own cars and happily stopped by every day to pick me up.

Other friends had access to their mother's wood-sided Country Squire station wagons. I listened for the signature honk of different horns, then bolted out the front door of my house and hopped in, lit up a Viceroy and cranked the volume on KDWB.

Soon I left for college in Chicago, where I had no need for a car, then later moved to Santa Fe where I walked or rode my bike.

The move to Mississippi was more rational than it might appear. The Mississippi River divides the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis where the boyfriend and I had both grown up, and where he had been recently active in a very public battle with developers and the St. Paul Port Authority (where my father happened to serve as Vice President), to preserve and save Pig's Eye Lake, a heron rookery.

Additionally, the boyfriend had previously attended a literary conference in Oxford, at Faulkner's beloved home Rowan Oak, and I suspected still harbored romantic notions of wearing seersucker suits and the writing life. So, studying environmental law at the University of Mississippi sounded good ... in theory. As I had already concluded, Ole Mistake.

Broke, bored and friendless, I embarked on a plan to finally get my driver's license. I had the notion that a female tester might be more sympathetic to my situation, so I began calling the driver's examination office every few days, faking a different accent each time, trying to find a date that a woman might be giving the test.

I had sense enough not to try and imitate a Mississippi drawl, but on the day that I was faking a Swedish accent, the receptionist informed me that on Friday, Leslie Lamar would be conducting exams and the driving school had a car that I could use to take

the test. After a litany of pre-test questions, which I mostly replied by enthusiastically gushing, "Ja, Ja," I had secured a one o'clock appointment with Leslie.

This was my ticket to ride. Feeling confident that a woman would be kind and less wedded to the formalities of people taking the test that actually knew how to drive, I hung up the phone quite elated. Until it quickly dawned on me that in just two days, I actually had to drive and pass the test.

The boyfriend took me to the appointment in his cherry red Volkswagen van, proud of the fact that he could still drive it despite a broken starter and a snapped clutch cable. As he pulled over and idled in front of the examination office, he turned to me and incredulously asked, "So how are you possibly going to pass a driving test? You can't drive for shit!" With more bravado than I was feeling I replied, "Because LESLIE is gonna LOVE me!"

At that exact moment a red-faced, middle-aged man wearing a lime green polo shirt and khaki pants emerged from the building.

"Hey ... I'm Leslie Lamar, y'all Swedish?"

"I'm not," the boyfriend responded tersely, putting his van in gear, anxious to get out of there.

"Uh...*Krakën ost blinken daag*," I spewed out, hoping it sounded like a Swedish goodbye. As the boyfriend drove away, I noticed the back of his head twisting left to right like a bobble head doll.

Leslie Lamar's breath smelled of spearmint and bourbon. We got in a Cutlass Supreme the color of root beer Lifesavers, me in the driver's seat and Leslie right next to me on the passenger side with one hand firmly secured on his own brake.

He began issuing commands and after a few minutes of abrupt lurches, dramatic braking, one erratic attempt at driving in reverse and a brief moment when the entire right side of the car was hung up on a yellow curb, my most dreaded moment arrived when Leslie said, "Darlin', why don't y'all parallel park now."

Looking as terrified as I actually was by this point, I grabbed my crotch and blurted, "*Tack Värsgå klinken winken*."

A panicked Leslie asked, "Ladies room?"

"Ja! Ja!" I said, pulling the car up to the office, slamming it in park and flying through the front door.

In the bathroom I had no plan whatsoever about what was to come next. I took my time splashing cool water on my face and washing my sweaty hands with bubble gum pink soap from a stainless-steel wall dispenser.

When I emerged, Leslie was sitting in a mushroom-colored pleather chair with a stack of papers and a flask in front of him on a Formica table.

Clearly the driving test was over.

"Now I know thangs must be a little different over there in Sweden," Leslie drawled, as he lifted a stamped document and handed it to me.

All I saw was the gold seal of the State of Mississippi and the word, passed.

Decades later, as the boyfriend — now husband said, I still can't "drive for shit." But my Swedish accent has steadily improved and should come in handy soon — I have to renew my license.