

CONSIDERING RESPONSIBLE STORYTELLING...

I'm an amateur writer of fiction and non-fiction. I'm not a reporter or a journalist. I'm not a researcher, or an academician. I'm not scholarly.

I like telling a colourful story, and I love evocative imagery, and poetic license.

In creating my meagre attempts at fiction, there's wiggle room: I'm not very dependent on historical accuracy or elaborate world-building, IMHO, the reader will likely allow minor inconsistencies if the characters and story are well-formed and worth caring about.

However with biography, I think it's different. If your subject is someone else you must contend with, and pay respect to, narratives that have already been developed around your subject – especially other people's real experiences and research.

Even if the subject is yourself, you're not immune from certain factors: the reality of the other people you've known, who you are writing about, and what you can or should ethically reveal which may affect others.

In my case, I think I can almost write anything I want, with the following ideas in mind:

1. I cannot embarrass or hurt my parents, since they have both passed on, but I could cause embarrassment or discomfort for other family members who may not agree with my stories.
2. The things I say about other people, places or events still reflects back on me and my character. All art is a form of self portrait.
3. Rule #2 means that if I embarrass someone else, by definition I am embarrassing myself.
4. Save your work often kids.

(I had written two or three more *really good, well-written points* here, but I lost my edits somehow and had to start over. Re-doing, starting a

new draft of even a small section, is my creative Kryptonite. I almost become paralyzed with indecision about whether or not to continue at all. Technology can totally kiss my ass.)

Anyway, on the topic of responsibly biographies, here are a few articles I'm going to read and books to consider, to see if they help me to think more about ethics and responsibility in biographical writing:

- The Ethics of Life Writing:
<http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GC0I=80140100295290>
- The Duties of a Biographer:
<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/14th-may-1881/15/the-duties-of-a-biographer>
- Debating the Ethics of Biography: How Close Is Too Close?
<http://www.signature-reads.com/2012/12/debating-the-ethics-of-biography-how-close-is-too-close/>
- What Should Biographers Tell?: The Ethics of Telling Lives
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/371400>
- The Quandary for Biographers: Get Up Close, but How Personal?
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/books/petraeus-biography-underscores-ethics-questions-for-authors.html>
- Biographers: Why do they fall out with the family and friends of their subjects?
<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/biographers-why-do-they-fall-out-with-the-family-and-friends-of-their-subjects-a6698286.html>