



WRITER'S CORNER

By Darien Gee

Bento Box Memoir

Quote of the Week: "Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing." (Benjamin Franklin)

Writing Exercise of the Week: A woman knocks on your door. She tells you she used to live in your house many years ago and left something behind in a secret compartment. Where is the secret compartment, what did she leave behind and why does she need it now? Write for 15 minutes. Post your results on our North Hawaii News Facebook page!

Hungry? Order up a Bento Box Memoir! Many a starving writer has found his writerly appetite sated by this deceptively simple method of discovering what memories go together. The result is an avalanche of life story material that can be used as a jumping off point for any

memoir. Bento boxes are one-person meals divided into lacquer or plastic boxes with multiple compartments, not unlike the TV dinners of the 1960's. Everything has its place, its own shape and flavor, and yet each food is complementary to the others, creating a complete meal. Writing your memoir is no different. You select different memories and remembrances and put them together to form your story.

Begin by choosing a period of time or a theme and write it down on the top of a piece of paper. A period of time could be a single day (birthday, wedding, first day of school) or span several years (college, living abroad, childhood, marriage), while a theme focuses on an overall thought, feeling or experience (loss, travel, coming

of age, spirituality). Let's choose "summertime" as our theme.

Your bento box can have as little as three compartments or as many as six. Let's go with four for our exercise. On your paper, draw a rectangle or square in the middle of the page. Then divide your container into four compartments.

Next, assign each compartment to a memory that's triggered by the time or theme you've chosen. The key here is not to overthink. Take the first memory that comes even if you're not sure how it's related. Write down the memory ("summer camp 1983") and five key words or phrases to anchor the memory ("boat capsized," "rattlesnake," "Jessica" "long bus ride," "the stars"). Continue this process with each compartment until they are all filled.

When you're done, stick your paper up on your wall. Go on with your day and don't give it another thought. Let it sit overnight.

When you're ready to start writing, look at your bento box and circle one key word or phrase from each compartment. Then write for 10 minutes about each key word, one from each compartment. Write whatever comes to mind, even if it seems to veer off from what you originally thought you'd be writing about.

You can write one key word a day (10 minutes), or finish a whole compartment (50 minutes). Remember that random thoughts are connected thoughts we just haven't found connections to yet, so don't assume what you've written doesn't make sense. When you finish a

bento box, go back and select another key word from each compartment and go through the process again. When all is said and done (either in four days or 20 days), you'll have 20 pieces of new writing connected by a time period or theme. You could write an entire book from this exercise alone.

So grab your pen and dig in! Darien's five-week workshop, *Writing Life Stories: Crafting the Memoir*, begins this week. Visit waimeaeducation.com for more information and to register.

Darien Gee is a national bestselling author based in Waimea. Her most recent novel is *The Avalon Ladies Scrapbooking Society*. She also writes under the name Mia King. Visit her at dariengee.com and miaking.com.





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