



ESL Podcast 997 – Writing One’s Memoirs

GLOSSARY

thrilled – very excited and pleased

* We’re thrilled to announce that we’ve hired a new director of marketing.

to publish – to create a book, newspaper, or magazine, arranging for written words to be put on paper and distributed

* He published his first novel when he was only 21 years old.

memoir – written account of important events or people in one’s life; an autobiography about specific events or people

* Horace changed the name of many of the people in his memoir in order to protect their privacy.

titillating – interesting, exciting, and arousing, especially in a sexual way

* The teacher caught the boys looking at titillating photographs.

industry – a group of companies and products or services related to a similar type of work

* Francine spent years in the airline industry, but now she’s looking for a job in the hospitality industry.

autobiographical – referring to what one has written about one’s own life

* How much of this book is autobiographical, and how much of it is fiction?

juicy – very interesting and possibly scandalous, designed to shock and make other people want to know more

* Krista always has juicy rumors about her co-workers.

salacious – relating to sex in a shocking, exciting, arousing, and inappropriate way to get other people’s attention

* We had no idea Grandma was once involved in such a salacious affair.

selflessness – putting other people’s needs and desires above one’s own; the opposite of selfishness; thinking about other people first

* Lyle’s volunteer work with local charities is a clear indicator of his selflessness.

tell-all – sharing all the details of something, without leaving anything out; all-inclusive

* This documentary is a tell-all account of what really happens behind the stage during a fashion show.



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affair – a romantic or sexual relationship outside of marriage

* Vicky filed for divorce when she found out that her husband was having an affair.

steamy – very hot and sexually exciting

* They shared a steamy weekend, but then she never heard from him again.

to tell tales – to tell stories, especially stories that are not entirely true

* People will be telling tales of our adventures for years to come.

to fly off the shelves – to sell very well, so well that stores cannot keep something available for sale because everyone wants to buy it

* The most popular toys always fly off the shelves in the weeks before Christmas.

scandalous – very shocking and involving bad, unethical, or immoral behavior

* It was so scandalous when Brandon took bribes for the bridge construction project.

infamous – famous in a bad way; very well-known for having done something bad, wrong, or illegal

* The program is infamous for wasting taxpayers’ money.

cat fight – a fight between two or more women, especially when they are fighting physically with each other

* Ingrid and her sister got into a cat fight over Stefan.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which types of stories would be the most titillating?
 - a) Stories with juicy details.
 - b) Autobiographical stories.
 - c) Stories about selflessness

2. What does Oscar mean when he says, “Your books won’t fly off the shelves without those juicy details”?
 - a) The books won’t be long enough.
 - b) The books won’t sell very well.
 - c) The books won’t have an attractive cover.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

juicy

The word “juicy,” in this podcast, means very interesting and possibly scandalous, designed to shock and intrigue people: “You won’t believe the juicy piece of news I just heard about Rebecca!” The word “juicy” is normally used to describe a food that contains a lot of flavored liquid: “These oranges are really juicy.” Or, “How do you cook juicy steaks?” When talking about work, a “juicy” assignment or role is a job that is enjoyable, high-paying, and impressive: “How did she get such a juicy overseas assignment after working here for only a few weeks?” Finally, when talking about money, the word “juicy” can mean involving a lot of money: “He negotiated for a juicy paycheck and a company car.”

affair

In this podcast, the word “affair” means a romantic or sexual relationship outside of marriage: “Brenda is having a affair with her secretary.” The word “affairs” can also refer to important issues or activities: “Seth reports on public affairs and community events for the community newspaper.” The phrase “current affairs” refers to all important events and news that are happening now: “The interview made it painfully clear that the candidate doesn’t watch the news and has no idea what is happening in current affairs.” Finally, the phrase “to be (one’s) affair” means to be one’s business, or to involve and concern only oneself: “From 9:00 to 5:00 you’re expected to work here, but how you spend the rest of your time is your affair.”



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CULTURE NOTE

American Memoirs on the Big Screen

Books are often “adapted” (created for a different type of presentation) for “the big screen” (movies), and some of them are memoirs. One of the better-known ones is This Boy’s Life, a 1989 memoir by Tobias Wolff. The memoir and the film “of the same name” (with the same title as the book) describe a boy’s teenage years as he and his mother travel across the United States. The 1993 film “stars” (has as leading actors) Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert DeNiro, and Ella Barkin.

Susanna Kaysen published her memoir, Girl, Interrupted, in 1993. It describes her experience living in a “mental institution” (a facility or hospital that treats people with mental illnesses) for 18 months. The 1999 film adaptation stars Winona Ryder, Angelina Jolie and Whoopi Goldberg, among others, and was very “well received” (liked and praised by critics and the public).

Angela’s Ashes, a 1996 memoir by Irish-American author Frank McCourt explores his years as a child and young adult facing difficult circumstances in New York and Ireland. The book was “quite” (very) popular, but the film adaptation made in 1999 was a “box office bomb” (a movie that loses a lot of money).

Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia is a 2006 memoir by Elizabeth Gilbert. It describes how she traveled internationally after her divorce, looking for meaning in her life. The memoir was adapted for film in 2010, starring Julia Roberts.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 997 – Writing One’s Memoir

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 996. I’m your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is ESLPod.com. Go there. Become a member of ESL podcast and download the Learning Guide for this episode. You can also like us on Facebook at facebook.com/eslpod – and, why not follow us on Twitter at @eslpod?

This episode is a dialogue between Oscar and Liz about writing your memoir – the story of your life. Let’s get started.

[start of dialogue]

Oscar: We’re thrilled that you’ll be publishing your memoir with our company. You’ve had such an interesting life. I’m sure you’ll have lots of titillating stories to tell.

Liz: Well, my memoir will certainly have a lot of stories about my career: the people I’ve worked with and the kindness I’ve encountered in this industry.

Oscar: That’s nice, but people buy autobiographical books for the juicy details, the more salacious, the better.

Liz: I was really thinking of focusing on the people who helped me in my career and their selflessness.

Oscar: But I thought you were interested in writing a tell-all book. Considering how many times you’ve been married and the affairs you’ve had, you must have lots of steamy stories.

Liz: I don’t want to be telling tales about people I love or once loved. I want to focus on the positive.

Oscar: You could do that, but your books won’t fly off the shelves without those juicy details.

Liz: Really?



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Oscar: Really.

Liz: Maybe I could tell one or two scandalous stories.

Oscar: Now you’re talking.

Liz: There was that infamous party where a cat fight broke out between . . .

[end of dialogue]

We begin our dialogue with Oscar saying to Liz, “We’re thrilled that you’ll be publishing your memoir with our company. You’ve had such an interesting life. I’m sure you’ll have lots of titillating stories to tell.” Oscar says that he and his company are “thrilled.” “To be thrilled” means to be very excited, to be very pleased with something.

“To publish” means to create a book, a newspaper, or a magazine – typically, things that are printed on paper and then you buy. However, that’s the traditional definition of “publish.” Now people publish things electronically. The more general use of the term, then, is to make something available for people to buy. It’s usually in the form of a book or a magazine or newspaper. You can also publish on a blog. So, the Internet has really changed our definition of “publish.”

Oscar is talking about publishing Liz’s memoir. A “memoir” (memoir) is a written account of your life. It’s an “autobiography,” we could also call it. It’s the story of your life. Oscar says that Liz’s stories are almost certain to be titillating. “To be titillating” (titillating) means to be very interesting or exciting, often in a possibly romantic or even sexual way. That’s the meaning of “titillating.”

Liz says, “Well, my memoir will certainly have lots of stories about my career: the people I’ve worked with and the kindness I’ve encountered in this industry.” Liz is talking about her memoir having a lot of stories about her career. Your “career” is roughly your work life. We suspect that Liz is probably an actress or perhaps a singer, someone who’s famous.

She is going to talk about the people she’s worked with and the kindness she’s encountered, or she has been met with, in this industry. “Industry” (industry) usually refers to a group of companies, all of whom make the same kinds of products or provide the same kinds of services. We could talk about the “automobile industry” – the group of companies that make automobiles. We could



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talk about the “entertainment industry” – all of the companies that make movies and television shows and records and so forth.

Here in Los Angeles, when someone says “the industry,” they are referring to the entertainment industry, because the entertainment industry is so important here in Los Angeles, nobody even calls it the “entertainment industry” or the “movie industry.” They just say “the industry.” And when you say that to someone in Los Angeles, they know you’re talking about the entertainment industry. Liz doesn’t say what industry she’s talking about, but we can guess that it’s probably “the industry” in the Los Angeles sense of that term.

Oscar says, “That’s nice, but people buy autobiographical books for the juicy details, the more salacious, the better.” “Autobiographical” refers to your own life, things that you have written about yourself. Most people don’t think about publishing autobiographies until they are older, although there are some celebrities and politicians who have published memoirs or autobiographies in their 20s and 30s and 40s, apparently believing that their lives are so interesting that everyone wants to know about them. Maybe I should publish my memoir, my autobiography. I’ll have to think about that. I don’t think my life is very interesting, unfortunately. I could always invent some things – make some things up.

Anyway, Oscar is saying that people buy these memoirs, these autobiographical books, “for the juicy details.” “Juicy” (juicy) here means interesting, but also shocking. Oscar says that these details should be salacious, “the more salacious, the better,” he says, meaning the more salacious the details, the better the book will be. “Salacious” (salacious), like titillating, also refers to things that are shocking, exciting, or scandalous, but related specifically to something sexual.

Liz says, “I was really thinking of focusing on the people who helped me in my career and their selflessness.” “Selflessness” (selflessness) refers to putting other people’s needs and desires before your own. “Selflessness” is the opposite of a more common phenomenon and word, “selfishness” (selfishness). “To be selfish” means to only be thinking about yourself. “To be selfless” means to be thinking about other people and not yourself.

Oscar says, “But I thought you were interested in writing a tell-all book.” A “tell-all book” is a book that gives people the details of one’s life, including secrets that no one has ever heard before. Oscar says, “Considering how many times you’ve been married and the affairs you’ve had, you must have lots of steamy stories.” Oscar is referring to Liz’s past. Apparently, she has been married more than once and has had “affairs” (affairs).



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The word “affairs” has a couple of different meanings, but here it means having a romantic relationship with someone to whom you are not married. You’re married to one person, but you’re having a romantic relationship with another person. That’s called “having an affair.” Oscars thinks that Liz has a lot of “steamy” (steamy) stories to tell. “Steamy” is similar to “salacious,” that we discussed earlier.

Liz says, “I don’t want to be telling tales about people I love or once loved.” “To tell tales” means to tell stories, especially stories that are not completely true. Liz says, “I want to focus on the positive” – the good things that have happened in her life. Oscar says, “You could do that, but your books won’t fly off the shelves without those juicy details.” “To fly off the shelves” (shelves) means to sell very quickly. “Shelves” is the plural of “shelf” (shelf), which is a place where you will find goods in the store to buy.

If you go into a grocery store, for example, there are lots of different shelves, usually three or four shelves in one area, and you have different types of food on each shelf. “To fly off the shelves” means to sell quickly, as if the goods that you are selling are somehow flying up into the air, they’re being purchased so quickly. Liz says, “Really?” She’s surprised at what Oscar is telling her. Oscars says, “Really.”

Liz then says, “Maybe I could tell one or two scandalous stories.” “Scandalous” (scandalous) is very shocking in a bad sort of way. Realizing her book will not sell very well unless she tells some scandalous stories, Liz agrees to do so. Oscar is happy. He says, “Now you’re talking.” That expression, “now you’re talking,” is used when you are agreeing with what the other person is saying. You’re telling the other person, “Yes, that’s exactly the kind of thing I want to hear.”

Liz says, “There was that infamous party where a catfight broke out between . . .” – and then the dialogue ends. “Infamous” (infamous) is famous in a bad way. You can be famous for doing something good. You can be “infamous” for doing something bad. Strangely, however, in recent years, people have started to use “infamous” to mean the same as “famous,” even though the traditional definition is being famous for doing something wrong, for doing something bad. You do not want to be infamous.

A “catfight” is a fight between two or more women. Why are they cats and not dogs? I’m not sure, but that’s the term we use when referring to a physical fight between two or more women. You can’t say “dogfight” for a fight between two or more men, however. It doesn’t work that way. In fact, the word “dogfight” means



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a fight between two airplanes up in the air fighting each other, as in a war. That’s a dogfight.

Then, of course, there’s a “bullfight” that you might see in Spain or Mexico, where they actually kill a bull. But we’re not talking about killing anyone here. We’re just talking about fighting, and that’s what Liz may tell about in her memoir.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Liz: Really?

Oscar: Really.

Liz: Maybe I could tell one or two scandalous stories.

Oscar: Now you’re talking.



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Liz: There was that infamous party where a cat fight broke out between . . .

[end of dialogue]

We are thrilled to have Dr. Lucy Tse writing our scripts here at ESLPod.com.
Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on ESL Podcast.

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