Writing Memoir or a Rivertooth Experience

The characteristics of an effective memoir include:

· describing a story from your life and musing on it, trying to unravel what it means in light of current knowledge or perspective: the story has significance in retrospect beyond the mere telling as the narrator attempts to make a judgment or evaluation about the experience, whether or not a definitive verdict is ever reached;

· a conversational, engaging voice: readers feel the narrator is speaking personally and directly to them, revealing feelings and thoughts, reactions and reflections;

· most often told in the first person with the narrator being the protagonist;

· a thoughtful, deliberate narrowing of scene, situation, and theme: a slice of life, not the whole loaf;

· the reader honors the author’s intent to replicate the truth rather than fictionalize it: it is read as if true, putting the responsibility of the narrator to be reliable as far as memory allows and experience limits;

· use of time and form may vary widely as your material emerges and takes shape: past tense may suddenly mingle with present or future; exact dates may be unimportant or critical to the story; the story itself may emphasize relationships, portraits, places, and self reflection more than plot;

· honesty demands risking your version of the particular story you are telling while balancing the needs of your readers: taboo subjects may put off readers unless you find a way to engage them without compromising the truth as you feel it or see it;

· pace of the story is slowed down so the reader can enter and live it, moment to moment, with the characters;

· enough context is given to understand the story’s events, but unnecessary details or tangents are left out.