Seminar: Reading and Writing Personal History

The seminar will focus on personal forms of history. In addition to the better known genres of autobiography and memoir, the course will give special attention to works written by historians, in a historian’s voice, on topics of immediate personal concern. We will explore the changing place of “objectivity” and “subjectivity” in professional historical writing and the emergence of new answers to the old question “What is History?” Methodologies of personal history will also be reviewed.

Common seminar readings will include short pieces on the methodology, theory and critique of personal history genres as well as examples of personal historical writing. Students will be expected to complete the readings for each session and come ready to participate in seminar discussions. For their seminar papers (20 pp.), students can choose to review and critique works of personal history from historical, methodological and theoretical perspectives, or to research and write a “personal history.”