WRITING PROMPT

1. Remember an object, big or small, that’s connected to this thing from your past. A piece of jewelry or a house. Sports equipment. If you want to animate the object it can be an animal, or a plant. If you want to really broaden it it can be a place (a school, a meadow, a lake, a department store). Take five minutes and write a paragraph describing what you came up with. If you don’t want to write a paragraph you can write a list of adjectives, and/or associations.

2. Now we’re going to go broader. How do you feel about the person or place or event now that it’s in the past? What did you learn from it? How did it change you? (A common embedded structure for writing in any form is Who I am, What I know, What happens – and how that last, what happens, changes who you are and what you know. So write a paragraph that’s devoted to what’s changed and how. Make it purely expository and analytic, describing the emotions, lessons, and residual conflicts.

3. Locate the last moment you interacted with this place/person/event. For example, if it’s a house you used to live in, write the last moment you were ever there. A person, the last time you interacted with them. If it’s an incident, write the last moment before it ended.

4. Once you’ve written that scene you have a choice. You can choose one of these three paragraphs as your ending. Or you can find a way to incorporate all three into one. Or — and this will work especially well if what you’ve written works as a progression — you can come up with a line, image, or action that gets to the heart of all three. Easy!
### FICTION

**The Great Gatsby**
by F. Scott Fitzgerald (novel):

“So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

**“This is Pleasure”**
by Mary Gaitskill (novella/short story):

“The beggar laughs behind me, shouts something I can’t hear. I turn, a dollar already in my hand.”

**“The Paper Menagerie”**
by Ken Liu (short story):

“Following the creases, I folded the paper back into Laohu. I cradled him in the crook of my arms, and as he purred, we began the walk home.”

### NONFICTION

**The Argonauts**
by Maggie Nelson (memoir):

“But is there really such a thing as nothing, as nothingness? I don’t know. I know we’re still here, who knows for how long, ablaze with our care, its ongoing song.”

**“The Love of My Life”**
by Cheryl Strayed (personal essay):

Healing is a small and ordinary and very burnt thing. And it’s one thing and one thing only: it’s doing what you have to do. It’s what I did then and there. I stood up and got into my truck and drove away from a part of my mother. The part of her that had been my lover, my wife, my first love, my true love, the love of my life.
“Some Stupid Shit”  
by Ross Gay (short essay about Thomas Jefferson’s quote, “The sun has not caught me in bed for fifty years.”):

“But this Jeffersonian sentence especially glows with stupidity, with cruelty, when you picture him at his desk, up before the sun in his parlor, drinking tea he did not make or pour, eating a crumpet he did not make or put on a plate, scratching this and other pithy statements with his quill dipped into a well he did not fill, because he owned six hundred people, most of whom were probably already at work.”

POETRY

“Association Copy”  
by Camille Dungy:

We make habits out of words. I grew accustomed to his, the way they spooned me into sleep so many times. Now I am sleepless and alone another night. What would you give for one more night alone? No booze. No drugs. Just that hunger and those words. He gave me The Names of the Lost. Need comes down hard on a body. What else was sold? What else—do you know?—did we lose

“This Be the Verse”  
by Philip Larkin:

Man hands on misery to man.  
   It deepens like a coastal shelf.  
Get out as early as you can,  
   And don’t have any kids yourself.

“Red Brocade”  
by Naomi Shihab Nye:

I refuse to be claimed.  
Your plate is waiting.  
We will snip fresh mint  
Into your tea.