O

n any given Tuesday,

each of the writers' stories is only a page in length. But Baraboo's Palm of the Hand memoirists are compilling the tales of their lifetimes — one memory at a time.

The monthly writing workshop group began about four years ago as a joint venture between the University of Wisconsin-Baraboo/Sauk County's T.N. Savides Library and the Baraboo Public Library. The writers, local community members, draw inspiration from the Palm of the Hand memoir method developed by East Coast poet and artist Michael Czarnecki, who recently visited Baraboo to share his work and lead one of the workshops.

The method encourages writers to build their stories by coming up with words and phrases that trigger memories and then treating the individual scenes as one-page stories. The group recently announced that it plans to publish an anthology of Sauk County individuals' own Palm of the Hand stories and encouraged group members and other area writers to send in their work for consideration in the book.

"I love the stories that I have," said Baraboo Public Library Director Meg Allen, a regular of the group and one of the book's three editors. "I love having them written down!"

Allen said she hopes to share her stories with her daughter and enjoy leaving a record for future generations.

Palm of the Hand stories are concise, sometimes representing only moments in time, and the group leaders are not fussy about grammar or other details. All that matters is that the memories are true to the writer's own recollection, said Marc Boucher, director of the library at UW-Baraboo.

"I'm here because I like to write," said Shirley Haugen, a Palm of the Hand regular known for her sharp wit and sense of humor. "And I like criticism."

"Giving, or getting?"

Boucher asked with a laugh. Haugen, other regulars and some newcomers attended the workshop facilitated by Czarnecki, who shared the origin of the memoir style.

Czarnecki was inspired to adapt the short fiction style of Japanese novelist Yasunari Kawabata to memoir writing. He said the latter is a task that often gets writers bogged down in "the immensity of the project."

Czarnecki said the shorter writing exercises work for people "because we all have led fascinating lives and have stories to share. The Palm of the Hand method works well for those who are serious writers and for those who never have written much in their lives. Anyone can do it!"

The first Palm of the Hand memoir workshop group began 17 or 18 years ago, sparking other groups in communities across the country. Czarnecki said the Baraboo group is the first to put together a Palm of the Hand memoir collection.

Poet Michael Czarnecki shares the inspiration for his Palm of the Hand memoir writing style during a recent visit to Baraboo.

Baraboo Public Library Director Meg Allen participates in the workshop portion of a recent Palm of the Hand memoir writing session.

David Wick memoir excerpt

Former Wisconsin State Trooper David Wick told the story of his first 1967 Ford Mustang during a recent Palm of the Hand workshop. After trading in the car, Wick ended up pulling its new owner over about a year later, the rice thrown at his wedding to his wife, Bonnie, still under the seats. "... It was probably in June or July of 1967 that our lives were changed. Bonnie had to work this one day, leaving early in the morning, and I worked a 3 p.m. to 11 shift that day. Bonnie called me shortly after getting to work and shared the bad — very bad — news. Our little Mustang had serious mechanical problems. The dealership in Janesville, Clifford Motors, suggested we trade the car in..."

Submission details

Authors must live, work or otherwise have a presence in Sauk County. Each submission should contain two 625-word (one-page) memoir stories written in the Palm of the Hand style. All materials must be received by July 15. In addition to the piece, authors should include a title, contact information, and a one-, two- or three-sentence biography to be included in the book's appendix.

Submit work via e-mail to palmofthehandmemoirs@gmail.com.

All of the guidelines for submission and more details on the Palm of the Hand style will also be on the university’s Palm of the Hand blog at spiritblogs.uwc.edu/memoirs.

A participant reads from a handwritten memoir story during a recent Palm of the Hand workshop.

"It is wonderful to see how it has grown and enthused a lot of people to work on their stories," he wrote in an e-mail. "Marc and Meg have done a terrific job in carrying it on beyond that first workshop I presented!"

The local Palm of the Hand
group will work with Czarnecki to take the book through its publication process, with Allen, Boucher and UW-Baraboo associate librarian Cate Booth serving as editors.

"What this proves to me is that everybody's got a story," Boucher said after hearing some of the group members shared their work.

He emphasized pieces in the book will be edited for grammar, spelling, punctuation and other errors, but the stories will not be changed. Potential contributors are invited to submit two pieces each, with the editors having the final say over what will appear in the book.

Organizers hope to have the book out by November, with $10 copies for sale at the local libraries and other locations. Czarnecki said he hopes to bring the copies to Baraboo in person.

The editors also plan to read of Palm of the Hand pieces to kick off the annual Summerset Festival of the Arts in late August.

Allen is working with public libraries throughout Sauk County to bring a Palm of the Hand workshop to each one and encourage more people from throughout the county to submit, Boucher said.

He said the publication of the book is meant to inspire people to get their life stories down and to create a snapshot of some of the memories of Sauk County's current residents.

"It's a way to get those stories down and pretty much available to the public for a very long time," he said.