# Lifetales

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## Workshop Sessions

- I promise to keep my talking to a bare minimum! You are here to WRITE!
- You do NOT need writing experience!
- I will provide occasional handouts of tips, assignments, etc.
- Bring your laptop if you want.
- I will provide pens, pencils, paper, etc.
- Participants are welcome to share what they write.

# Contents


Workshop Sessions ..... 1

Week 1: Introduction, Disclaimer, Timeline ..... 1

About Lifewriting ..... 1

Peer Editing in a Workshop ..... 2

Possible Talking Points ..... 2

Definitions ..... 4

Assignment 1- Why are you here? ..... 6

Items to include in your memoir ..... 7

Finding Your Publishable Story ..... 8

Truth in Memoir ..... 8

Assignment 2 – Disclaimer ..... 9

The Timeline ..... 10

Assignment 3 – Make a Timeline ..... 12

Week 2: Writing Tips, Paragraph writing. Firsts & Favorites ..... 13

Rules for Writing ..... 13

Scenes ..... 14

Assignment 4 – Write a scene from a photo ..... 14

Firsts ..... 15

Favorites ..... 15

Which story do I start with? ..... 16

Maps ..... 16

Week 3: Core Events & Relationships ..... 17

Core Events (Your THEME) ..... 17

Assignment 5 – Find your core events ..... 17

Relationship & Event Lists ..... 18

Challenges ..... 19

Assignment 6 – An Emotional Event ..... 19

Week 4: Elements of Storytelling ..... 21

Characterization ..... 22

Assignment 7 – Your Characters..... 22
Voice..... 23
Assignment 8 – The Movie of Your Life..... 23
Point of View..... 24
Assignment 9 – Playing with Point of View..... 24
Sample 1st Person - How They Met..... 25
Sample 3rd Person – How They Met..... 26
Setting..... 27
Assignment 10 – Set the Scene..... 27
Plot Development..... 28
Week 5: Interviewing & Researching..... 29
Successful Interviews..... 29
Assignment 11 – Interview a Family Member or Friend..... 29
Research..... 30
Week 6: Putting it all Together, Publishing..... 31
Some Thoughts on Publishing..... 32
Self-Publication..... 33
Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing)..... 34
Blurb..... 35
Lulu..... 35
A Note on Pricing Your Book..... 36
PROOFREAD, I beg you!..... 37
Memory Sparkers..... 39

# Week 1: Introduction, Disclaimer, Timeline

## About Lifewriting

We all think that we are not famous enough to write our memoirs, but this is a misconception! What would you do if you came upon a manuscript written by your great grandmother in the late 1800's?? Wouldn't you be thrilled beyond words to hear what life was like then? Wouldn't you be excited to find that people then loved, lost, and lived much as you do today?? How did they handle it? How did everyday life make them feel??

Why should we write our memoirs?

- To remember and honor our lives.
- To bring our family members together.
- To bring new insight to our lives.
- To provide future generations with a look at life as we knew it.
- To facilitate a healing experience within our lives.
- To connect us to history.

"People today are rootless and aching for connections to the past", says Lettice Stuart, a Texas personal historian who records the memoirs of everyday people. The process of documenting their lives often brings family members together and, as their life tale unfolds, they will find themselves gaining new insights into events that took place, perhaps even bringing about healing to the past.

It is the ***act of writing,*** not the words themselves that produce a healing in the writer. Therefore, one need not be a scholar or novelist to reap the benefits of lifewriting.

"This is who I am because this is how I began… by paying attention to the illogical, unexpected details, we just might light upon the odd yet precise images that help our lives make sense, at least long enough for our purpose as writers." - Tell It Slant by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola

## Peer Editing in a Workshop

- Listen quietly while the author reads their piece. Don't interrupt them.
- Never attack the author.
- Never criticize the author.
- Always say at least one thing that you liked about the piece.

## Possible Talking Points

- Three aspects of the piece that I liked…

- Three puzzling or confusing aspects of the piece to me…

- Three suggestions for improvement that I have for the piece…

# Some Lifetales Workshops

- Getting Started: Nuts & Bolts of Memoir Writing
- From Interview to Memoir
- Legacy: That One Special Person
- Traditions & Family Recipes
- Sacred Self: Finding Your Self Through Memoir
- Healing Through Memoir: Grief & Loss
- Telling the Truth in Memoir
- Power of Women: Writing Your Story of Triumph
- Editing and Revising Your Memoir
- Marketing Your Memoir
- Changing the Facts: Personal Stories to Fiction

Published Memoirs from My Workshops

*He Jumped into Jupiter: What Really Happened* Stories of Jupiter and Palm Beach County by native son, Bobby Culpepper

*Eat! Sleep! Meditate!* By Marva Riley, R.N.

*Bruce Lee Chronicles* by Tiger Rock, LMT

*The Brooklyn Hobo* by Alexander Procho

*Rogues Island Memoir* by Rod Haynes

# Some ways to organize...

**Turning Point**
Most people who are interested in lifewriting have a particular story they want to tell, about a time that significantly changed their life. Write about that moment of time when you crossed a threshold into a new self.



**The Early Years**
Write about childhood memories – places you lived, friends from your youth, family traditions, experiences that shaped you into the person you are today.

**Loves of Your Life**
How many great loves have you had in your life? Write about your experiences with these great loves and how they shaped and changed your definition of love.

**Family History**
Preserving your history is a gift to the world that never ends. Who were your ancestors and how did they contribute to who you are today? Reach back into the past and bring your ancestors to life so they can live forever throughout the generations.

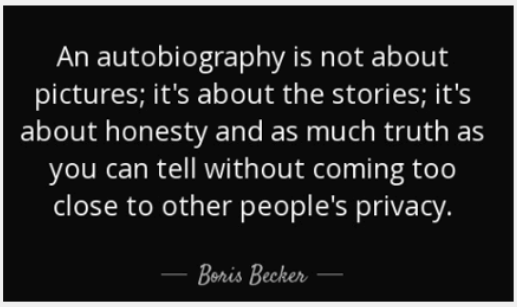
## Definitions

# Definitions

| Autobiography | Memoir |
| --- | --- |
| The account of a person's whole life by that person. | A personal essay that ruminates on a single event in a person's life. |

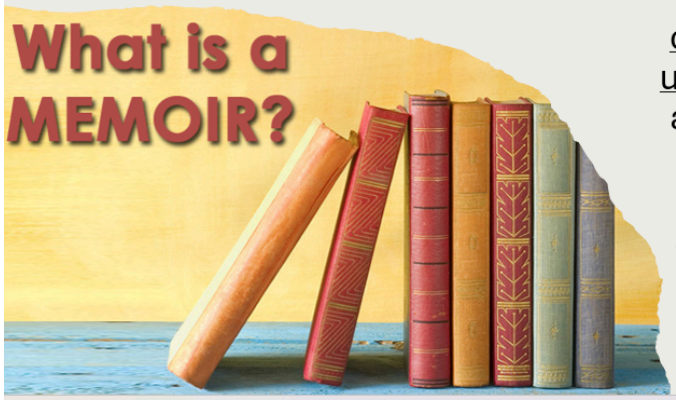
## What is Autobiography?

- Autobiography is always incomplete.
- It is the story of one's ENTIRE life, but it can never be completed.
- It begins with your birth and ends when you stop writing, which makes it incomplete because you still have more life to live.




**Autobiography**

**"A self-written account of the author's own life."**




"Unlike autobiography, which moves in a dutiful line from birth to fame, memoir narrows the lens, focusing on a time in the writer's life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or public service or some other special circumstance."

- William Zinsser, journalist and nonfiction writer

## *Characteristics of the Memoir Form*

| Memoir | Autobiography |
|---|---|
| Focuses on a brief period or series of related events | Covers a person's entire life to date |
| Uses many of the elements of storytelling | Does not generally use storytelling techniques |
| Has a fictional quality even though the story is true | Is a true account of a person's life and reads like nonfiction |
| Can be a therapeutic experience for the writer | Can be a therapeutic experience for the writer |
| Includes the author's feelings and thoughts | Does not require the author's feelings and thoughts, can be 'just the facts' |

## Assignment 1- Why are you here?

# Assignment

- Why do you want to write your life stories?
- What do you hope to get out of this workshop?
- What are your concerns about writing a memoir or autobiography?

A memoir's takeaway is a gift to the reader: something heartfelt, universal, and true.

Brooke Warner

## Items to include in your memoir




- Photographs, maps, and/or drawings of places you lived
- Photographs, maps, and/or drawings of places you visited
- Photographs, maps, and/or drawings of places you went to school
- Photographs, maps, and/or drawings of places you worked
- The history of the town you grew up in
- Newspaper clippings of events that happened in your lifetime
- Favorite poems or essays
- Favorite songs
- Your own creative endeavors (photographs, poetry, stories, drawings, etc.)

## Finding Your Publishable Story

So, you would like to see your name in print? Many people ask me how to write a publishable memoir. This question always reminds me of Rod Haynes. Rod and I emailed a few times, regarding his book *Rogues Island Memoir*. I can't say that I helped him much; I believe he had completed the book by the time he met me. But I was delighted to speak with him.

Rod chose to write about a certain period of his life - his childhood years growing up in the turbulent sixties and living with a sister who would eventually succumb to Cystic Fibrosis.

This is the way to see your work published. A published book has a central theme running through it, as in Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*. So, your job is to choose a slice of your life to write about.

## Truth in Memoir

Autobiographical writing is inherently the truth. Your truth. That is an important distinction.

We all remember things differently. Your sister will likely remember events in a different way than you, for example. In addition, what you think about your life today may not be what you think about it twenty years from now. This is the problem with autobiography – it is subjective to time, forever changing  depending on the moment it is written down.

If you approach the writing worrying about who you might upset, you won't get much writing completed.

You must convince your brain that you are allowed to tell *your* story the way *you* remember it.

## Assignment 2 – Disclaimer

One way to deal with the subjectivity of memory is to add a disclaimer to the front pages of your work.

**A few examples from Tristine Rainer, author of *Your Life as Story*:**

"Where I have been unable to remember fully, I have allowed my imagination to fill in."

"To protect the privacy of certain individuals I have in many ways disguised their identities."

"Sometimes I have taken poetic license with the order of events for the sake of the narrative."

**I like to use this one:**
All of the contents herein are based on memory – *subjective memory*. Therefore, the stories found on these pages, while based on real happenings, are subject to the tricky minefields of memory

ASSIGNMENT: Write your disclaimer first, before you begin writing your story. Doing so will give you permission to write honestly and creatively. You can always change it later.

## The Timeline




You will never say "What do I write about?" if you make a TIMELINE!

The timeline organizes your stories in one easy place you will be able to return to over and over.

Fill it with people, places, and events!

The important thing to keep in mind is that you will never get your memoir written unless you start! Start anywhere but START!

I find it easiest when teaching writing classes to begin with lists, progress to sentences then paragraphs, and finally put it all together. I suggest that you do the same. Make list after list after list – this way you will never have a reason to cry Writer's Block because your list of writing ideas is right on hand.

We will begin with the…**TIMELINE**

The backbone of your lifestories is your Timeline. This is an extended chart of the relationships and events that have shaped your life. These are the people and events that have made you the person you are today.

**EVENTS IN YOUR LIFE:** Here are a few to get you started: • an illness or a death in the family • the arrival of a sibling • the ethnic group you grew up in • the religious group you grew up in • a certain relationship with a peer • a failure or success at school • a decision you made to do or not do something • an external event such as a fire, flood, tornado, auto accident • marriage • children • career choices • spiritual experiences • divorce

This is but a few of the major events that turn a person's life to one direction or the other. The list you make may be many pages long or relatively short. This depends on the individual. You may add to this list as you remember things. Include everything you can think of that had any impact on your life.

## A Sample Timeline from *The Brooklyn Hobo* by Alexander Procho

| Birth | 1-12 | 13-18 | 19-30 | 30-50 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Triplets born in upstate New York 1951<br><br>2 sisters<br><br>Single mother | Younger sister born<br><br>Mother hospitalized<br><br>Moved to Brooklyn<br><br>Father, Mafia connections | Don't fit in during teen years<br><br>Woodstock<br><br>Vietnam<br><br>Left home to travel across the country<br><br>Drugs, hippies, rehab | Hitched a ride on a freight train<br><br>Attended several colleges<br><br>Met crazy people while hitchhiking across country<br><br>Daughter born<br><br>Rehab | Married (and divorced)<br><br>Another daughter born<br><br>Rehab again<br><br>Father dies<br><br>50th birthday and the Twin Towers |

| 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963 | 1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Mona born Oct 15 | | I was born June 20 in Gainseville Florida | moved to Florida Mango Road in Lake Worth, Florida | July 26 Grandma Flo dies in a car accident. Mother is injured in the accident and loses her front teeth. | | Summer Trip to Washington, DC with Mother and Daddy | Mother left | 1st grade several different schools | 2nd grade several different schools |
| | | The civil rights movement began | | | In his annual state of the Union address, President Johnson proposes his Great Society program (Jan. 4). L. Johnson's second inauguration (Jan. 20). | Miranda v. Arizona: Landmark Supreme Court decision further defines due process clause of Fourteenth Amendment and establishes Miranda rights (June 13). | Kindergarten Jupiter Elementary | April or May Mother took us to Maine to live. Daddy came and got us after a few weeks. | Richard Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th president (Jan. 20). |
| | | Cuban Missile Crisis | President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Tex. (Nov. 22). He is succeeded in office by his vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson. | President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act (July 2). | State troopers attack peaceful demonstrators led by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., as they try to cross bridge in Selma, Ala. (March 7). | | Parents divorced. | Daddy married Mom (Nancy Bell Ripley) | Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin, Jr., become the first men to land on the Moon (July 20). |
| | | Lt. Col. John Glenn becomes first U.S. astronaut to orbit Earth(Feb. 20). Cuban Missile Crisis: President Kennedy denounces Soviet Union for secretly installing missile bases on Cuba and | [illegible] before a crowd of 200,000 during the civil rights march on Washington, DC | | [illegible] prohibits discriminatory voting practices (Aug. 6). I | | | Rev. Martin Luther [illegible] assassinated in Memphis, Tenn. (April 4). | |

Another Timeline Example

## Assignment 3 – Make a Timeline




childhood…teen years…young adult…middle age…senior years

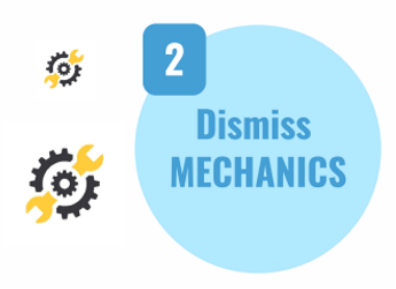
or

birth..1-12..13-18..19-30..30-50..50-70..70-100

Mark pivotal points on the timeline as reference points in your writing.

# Week 2: Writing Tips, Paragraph writing. Firsts & Favorites.

The goal of this week is to get you comfortable with UNEDITED paragraph writing. You may never use any of these paragraphs in your final memoir, but the exercises will help to loosen you up and break through those pesky writing blocks.




Forget about the grammar, the spelling, and the organization!

You don't need a theme or fabulous word choice!

All of that can be done MUCH later.

JUST WRITE!

## Rules for Writing

- Start with one story at a time.
- Make a schedule to write at least one page every day and stick to it!
- Remember to include your feelings about the event!
- If you write only one page per day, you will have 365 pages in one year!
- Use sensory detail.
- For now, **ignore spelling and grammar**. If you worry about getting every sentence perfect, you will never finish your writing!
- You can check facts later. Don’t worry if you forgot someone’s name or a particular date-just get the story written!!! You can go back later!
- You may want to alter names and identities to protect your loved ones. (We’ll talk about that later!)

## Scenes

A great way to break out of your fear of writing is to train yourself to write in 'scenes'.

- Describe the scene.
- Use dialogue.
- Include feelings!

Sample Scene

*I wrote this scene after seeing a photo of the car accident where my grandmother was killed.*

My grandmother was killed instantly as her head slammed into the windshield. Mother hit the steering wheel with such force that her front teeth were knocked out. Those were the days before seatbelts, and neither was wearing one. My mother says, "You would have been on her lap." That is true; that would have been the logical place for a two-year-old in 1964 on a car trip. If not there, then you probably would have seen me asleep in the back window, in which case I too would have been flung like a rag doll through the windshield.

"To write short nonfiction requires an alertness to detail, a quickening of the senses, a focusing of the literary lens, so to speak, until one has magnified some small aspect of what it means to be human." - Bernard Cooper

## Assignment 4 – Write a scene from a photo

ASSIGNMENT: Find a photo that evokes memory for you. Imagine you are explaining that photo to someone.

"I was at Woodstock, and it was pouring rain...."

"Mary had just walked in the door and..."

"The weather was erratic that day..."

## Firsts

Firsts lead you into deeper territory. The first *anything* is usually a memorable experience and quite often marks a change in our lives. Again, try to write at least a paragraph for each suggested topic. Remember, these paragraphs can be fitted into your larger memoir.
**Remember! Use your five senses!**

### A Sample First Paragraph
Written by a workshop participant

*The First House I Remember Living In*

We lived on Florida Mango Street, a typical street of suburban houses that all looked the same. It was a place of backyard barbecues, cookie baking housewives, and mammoth cars of various pastel colors. Everything was pastel – the houses, the cars, and the women. My world was a swirl of muted pinks, blues, greens, and yellows. We had two concrete swans that stood sentinel watch at the front door. The driveway was a half-moon. The backyard stretched for an eternity in my child's eye, muted green grasses waving invitingly and daring my father to take out the mower and slice paths through the tangles. Which he did from time to time; sometimes waiting for the grass to reach a height of almost out-of-control – like everything else in the sixties.

## Favorites

Practice writing about each favorite – even if it seems silly – the act of remembering and writing will keep your creative energy flowing.

Try to write at least a full paragraph about each thing.

**Remember! Use your five senses!**

### A Sample Favorites Paragraph
Written by a workshop participant

Isadore taking Leah to see the trains

The train smelled like hard-boiled eggs. She sat on the empty luggage cart swinging her legs and rubbing her little hands together in anticipation. If she strained her ears, she could just make out the far off chooo-chooo as the train rumbled its way into town. Her father stood beside Leah, straight and tall, and adjusted his starched collar.

## Which story do I start with?

The answer to that question is - ANY story!

Pick one from the TIMELINE and WRITE!

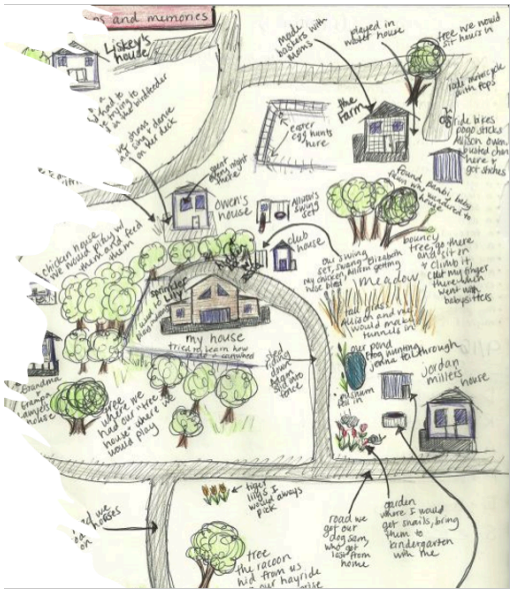
The story you put on paper will change day to day.

**COMMIT to writing at least a paragraph!**




## Maps

1. Draw a map to the house of your childhood.
2. Sketch out a diagram of the house. Now tell me what your room looked like. Where did the family spend most of their time? Did you have a secret hide-away?
3. Now, write about the house that you drew. Using your five senses, tell us about the house and the occupants.



# Week 3: Core Events & Relationships

From your core events, can you choose one that impacted your life? Are there several events that came together at one period of your life and changed your life forever?

For memorists, the **central theme = life change**.

## Core Events (Your THEME)

## Assignment 5 – Find your core events

ASSIGNMENT: Look at your timeline. Can you identify 3-5 core events? *Do the events you chose have any core theme in common?* When you have isolated an event, look at it from all angles and write down its key points.

***Answer these questions for each event you choose.***

1. *How old were you?*
2. *What was happening in the world at that time?*
3. *What was the value or moral code that existed at that time and how did it affect the event?*
4. *How did all of these factors come together to create your epiphany?*

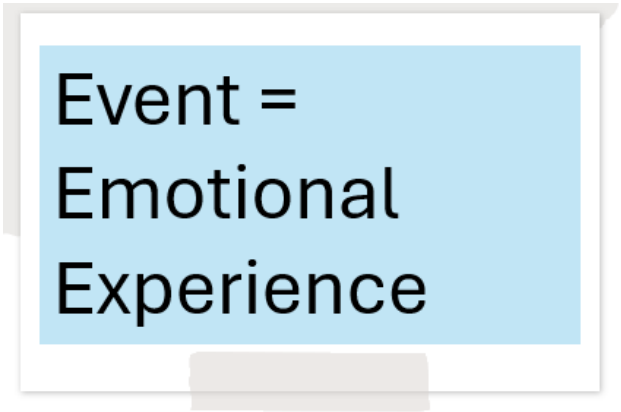
***Now, choose one event and write at least one paragraph about it.***

## Relationship & Event Lists

- Make a list of the crucial events in your life.
- Start with your birth (did something extraordinary happen when you were born?) and then move on through your childhood, young adult years, middle age, etc.
- From those events, can you choose one that impacted your life the most?

**Sample Emotional events:**

- A nightmare
- A birth
- Visit to doctor/dentist
- A time you got hurt emotionally
- A time you got hurt physically
- A death
- A promise made
- A promise broken
- A neighborhood bully
- A time you were jealous
- A time you got very angry
- A trip you took
- An argument you had




## Challenges

- Did someone in your family die?
- Did your parents divorce?
- Have you struggled with an illness?
- Did a best friend come into your life and change the way you

These are but a few of the challenges you may have faced.

I am sure you can think of more.

looked at the world (think about the movie "My Girl").

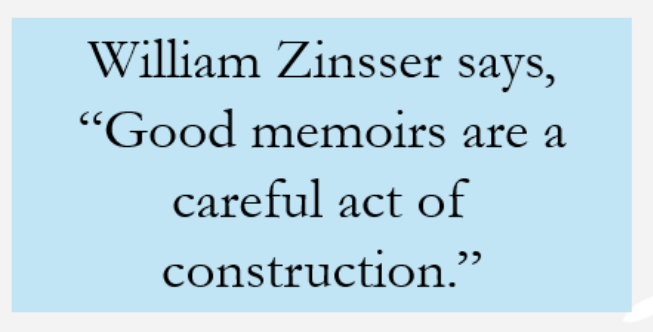
- Did a natural disaster or war have an impact on your life?

## Assignment 6 – An Emotional Event

ASSIGNMENT: Write about an emotional event.

## Week 4: Elements of Storytelling

What are the elements of “construction” that the storyteller or memoir writer controls?




Characterization

Voice

Event

Setting

Plot development!

## Characterization

Think about the people in your life. These are the characters that will people your stories.

Make a list of all the key characters in your life. Sometimes it helps to complete a character on each person that you can refer back to from time to time.

You can make your characters come alive by remembering to *show* who they are and what *your feelings* are towards them.

Don't just tell your readers about them – make them come alive by having them move, talk, *act*.

*"...yours is not the only story for perspective on family or on your community, but it is a perfectly valid voice among the chorus."*

*Tell It Slant* by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola

## Assignment 7 – Your Characters

ASSIGNMENT: List some of the characters in your story.

## Voice

- Every person has his or her own voice.

We know authors by their voice. Walt Whitman and Stephen King have very different voices. It's okay if you don't know what your voice is yet.

In writing personal histories, try to stick as close as possible to your own personality. Be genuine.

Forget publishing, forget other people reading your words, and just write as if you were telling a story to a friend or writing in your journal.

## Assignment 8 – The Movie of Your Life

ASSIGNMENT: If a movie were made of your life, what start would play you? Why?

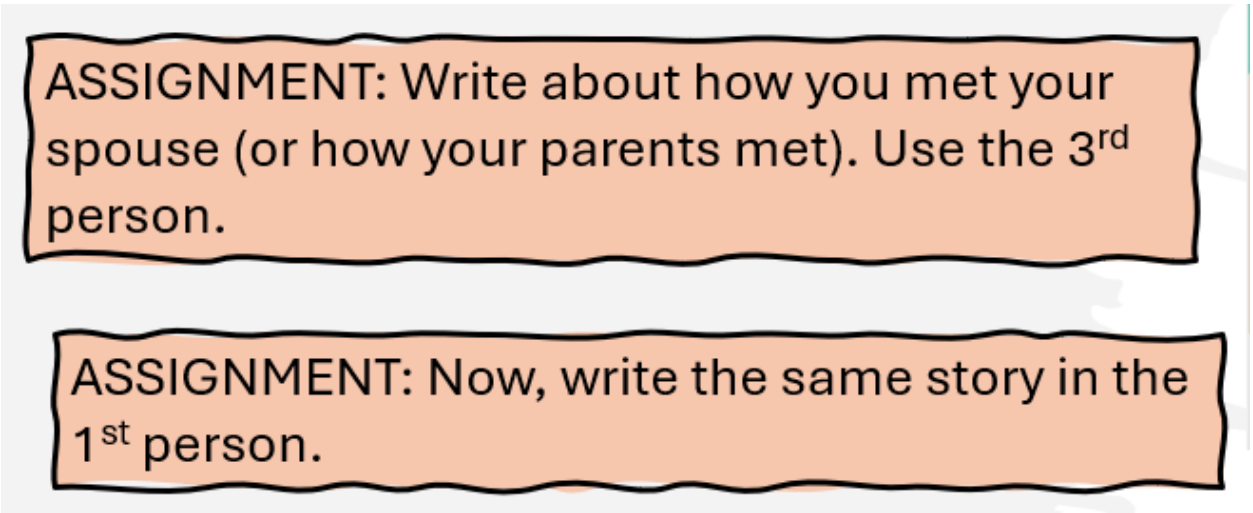
## Point of View

First person POV is the one most memoir writers use. Although sometimes it is helpful to write a scene in the third person in order to distance yourself from an emotional event.

This is okay. You may find that once you've explored the event from a third person point of view you will be better able to access the event and its characters in a more compassionate and honest way.

When writing in the third person, the main character is the author of the story (not necessarily YOU!)

## Assignment 9 – Playing with Point of View



## Sample 1st Person - How They Met

The Bolita man just left. The man always talks too much. Here I sit with all this washing to get done and that man has to come a-knocking on my door. I don't believe in gambling, and I tell him that every time he shows up here – which is once a week, right after payday at the Naval Yard because he knows folks has got the money then for such foolishness. He's sweet on little Jo – that's how come he talks so blame much. Damn Bolita man. I tell him every week that Jo is only twelve years old and she sure as hell wouldn't take up with a scraggly little Cuban man selling lottery tickets.

That's a lie actually. The only reason I know Jo wouldn't take up with the likes of him is because I know she is smitten with my boy, Ernest. Not that I approve of that match either, mind you. Ernest just turned twenty and has been off these six months in London, England. He looks so smart in his Air Force uniform. I guess I can understand why Jo is so taken with him.

My boy came home yesterday. He came a-strutting down the back alley of our house on Watson Street looking like his Daddy used to look when he would come home from hunting, all puffed up with pride and knowing how good he looked. I still ache inside remembering the loss of that man. And I ache even more with the loss to Ernest of knowing his Daddy – Bill never even knew Ernest was coming when he died out there in them swamps.

Anyway, they don't know I was watching when Ernest turned that corner into the alley looking so fine. Jo was lending me a hand with the young-un's and had taken them out for a stroll in the carriage. She is such an itty-bitty thing but developing too damn fast in my opinion. Men's eyes take to rolling back in their damn heads whenever Josephine Garcia goes strolling by. Ernest hadn't seen that little girl for several years – he being off to the war and her still at least *looking* like a child when he left. So, I watched from the window as he rounded the corner in his smart Air Force uniform, head cocked to one side and duffel bag thrown over his left shoulder. And I watched as Jo looked up from fussing with baby Tommy's diaper and caught sight of my boy coming down that alley.

I expect I knew then there was nothing I could do about it. But it worries me fearsome, I can tell you that. That little scrap of a child-woman doesn't have a chance. And neither does my boy. I saw the whole thing though they don't know it. And I done lived long enough on this world to know those two fool children done fell in love with each other and they don't even know it yet.

Well, I best get back to my washing.

## Sample 3rd Person – How They Met

Flo sank down into a tattered sofa. The Bolita Man had just left. The man always talked too much. She had so much washing to get done and that man had to come a-knocking on her door. Flo didn't believe in gambling, and she told him that every time he showed up – which was once a week, right after payday at the Naval Yard because he knows folks has got the money then for such foolishness. The Bolita Man was sweet on little Jo – that's how come he talked so blame much. Damn Bolita man, she thought. She told him every week that Jo was only twelve years old and she sure as hell wouldn't take up with a scraggly little Cuban man selling lottery tickets.

But Flo knew that was a lie. The only reason she knew Jo wouldn't take up with the likes of the Bolita Man was because she knew Jo was smitten with her boy, Ernest. Not that she approved of that match either, mind you. Ernest just turned twenty and had been off these six months in London, England. Flo smiled to herself as she pictured Ernest in his Air Force uniform. "I reckon I can understand why Jo is so taken with him." she said to herself.

Ernest had come home yesterday. He came a-strutting down the back alley of their little house on Watson Street looking like his Daddy used to look when he would come home from hunting, all puffed up with pride and knowing how good he looked. Flo still ached inside remembering the loss of that man. And she ached even more with the loss to Ernest of knowing his Daddy – Bill never even knew Ernest was coming when he died out there in them swamps.

Anyway, Ernest and Josephine didn't know Flo was watching when Ernest turned that corner into the alley looking so fine. Jo was lending her a hand with the young-un's and had taken them out for a stroll in the carriage. Just last week Flo had told her daughter-in-law, Connie, "That Josephine is such an itty-bitty pretty thing but developing too damn fast in my opinion." And it was true. Men's eyes took to rolling back in their damn heads whenever Josephine Garcia went strolling by. Ernest hadn't seen that little girl for several years – he being off to the war and her still at least *looking* like a child when he left. So, Flo stood on the back porch and watched from the window as he rounded the corner in his smart Air Force uniform, head cocked to one side and duffel bag thrown over his left shoulder. And she watched as Jo looked up from fussing with baby Tommy's diaper and caught sight of that handsome soldier boy coming down that alley. Hell, the sight took even Flo's breath away.

Flo figured there was nothing she could do about it. But it worried her fearsome. That little scrap of a child-woman didn't have a chance. And neither did Ernest. Flo saw the whole thing though they didn't know she knew. And she figured she had done lived long enough on this world to know those two fool children done fell in love with each other and they don't even know it yet.

## Setting

➡ Use your five senses – sight, sound, taste, touch, smell – to help you visualize your setting.

➡ Consider the season, weather, time of day – incorporate these elements into your description.

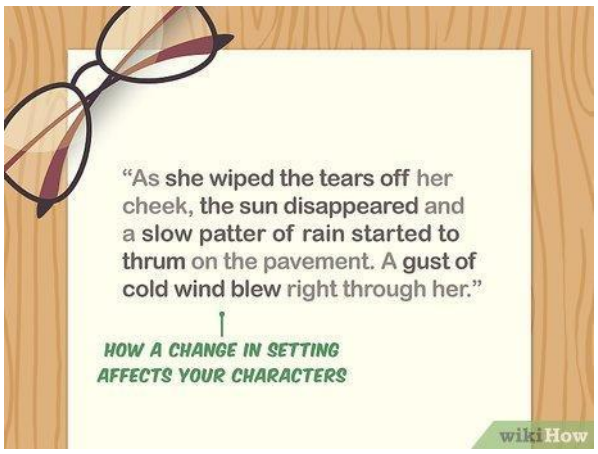
➡ Consider how you want your reader to see the scene.

- What will they see first?
- What is the most important thing in the scene that you want them to see?
- What FEELING do you want to reader to have?

## Assignment 10 – Set the Scene

ASSIGNMENT: Write about your childhood home or write about your favorite place. Set the scene for your reader.

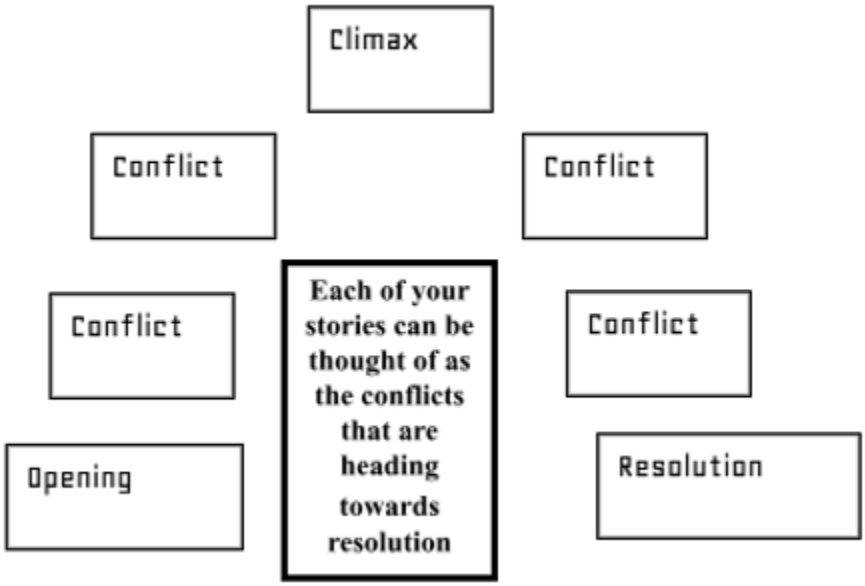


## Plot Development

The definition of plot is the sequence of events.  The sequence of events does not have to be linear. Many authors employ flashback – jumping back in time throughout the narrative to recall an earlier scene.  The important thing to remember about plot is that the reader should be able to pick it out pretty quickly.

The plot generally contains some sort of conflict. This should be fairly easier for the Memoir writer since life is basically one conflict after another. Conflict is not necessarily something bad that happens. Conflict in the narrative sense occurs whenever something – good or bad – occurs that moves the characters further along towards some type of resolution.



# Week 5: Interviewing & Researching

*“No talking reporter ever had a good interview.”*

– John Hohenber, writer for The Professional Journalist

## Successful Interviews

- If you’re using video equipment, make sure to charge your camera ahead of time. Know how much battery time you have before arriving.
- Plan to also use an audio recorder as a backup. If your video recorder runs out of battery, your audio recorder will still be recording.
- Prepare questions ahead of time. A good question leads to a *detailed* explanation.
- Do background research about the person ***before*** the interview.
- Ask open-ended questions, ones that require more than a yes or no answer.
- Ask follow-up questions based on answers they might give.
- Be prepared! Bring along photos and other memorabilia to spark the person’s (and yours!) memory.
- When taking notes, develop a shorthand that works for you – jot down key words instead of whole sentences – you can write it up later.
- Try to not interrupt the person when they are talking. If you have a question or need clarification, jot a note on your pad and ask your question when they finish talking.
- Always send a thank you note after the interview.

## Assignment 11 – Interview a Family Member or Friend

ASSIGNMENT: Interview a member of your family. Jot down possible questions you will ask BEFORE the interview.

## Research




After conducting an interview with a family member, look at your notes and perform some detailed research on people and places that were mentioned.

Did your relative stay in a hospital for a lengthy amount of time? Research the hospital.

Where did the relative come from? Research the place – Odessa, Coney Island, Key West, Chicago, etc. You get the idea!

Did your relative witness a world event? A battle? A natural disaster?

Do some research on the event.

## Week 6: Putting it all Together, Publishing

### NOW you can begin putting all your STORIES together!




Organize them into a theme, edit them, add to them, BRING THEM TOGETHER into a full-length MEMOIR.

Carefully review each of the scenes that you wrote.

- Did you add enough (or too much!) detail?
- Do your details use all the senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch)?
- Recalling the theme that you chose, does each scene further the story you want to tell? It might be a beautifully written scene, but does it need to be saved for another essay rather than this one?

If you need help, consider hiring a consultant and/or editor.

## Some Thoughts on Publishing

When you are finished writing however, you may begin thinking about publishing your memoirs. There are many places to do this.

Unless you are famous or have an advanced degree in writing, you can pretty much forget about getting picked up by Random House. 99.9% of the average memoir writers are going to have to self-publish.

Very rarely – but it does happen – a book will be so successful that a major house will take notice and pick it up.

Publishing should never be your main goal when writing *anything*.

**Focusing on getting published means that your narrative will never get written.**




Never EVER use a vanity publisher!

They will charge you a fortune and promise you the moon. You will get NOTHING they promise!

When in doubt, google any publisher to determine if they are a vanity publisher.

# DO YOUR RESEARCH!

## Self-Publication

There are many, many places out there offering help with self-publication.

You can pay for the printing and these places will list your book on their website and market it for you.

In my experience though, the marketing they do is extremely limited.

You should be prepared to do the bulk of the marketing on your own. Even traditional publishers expect their authors to do their own marketing!



## Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing)

This is the go-to place for self-publishing these days. Amazon's reach is far and wide, and you get the best exposure by publishing with them.

They make it easy too!

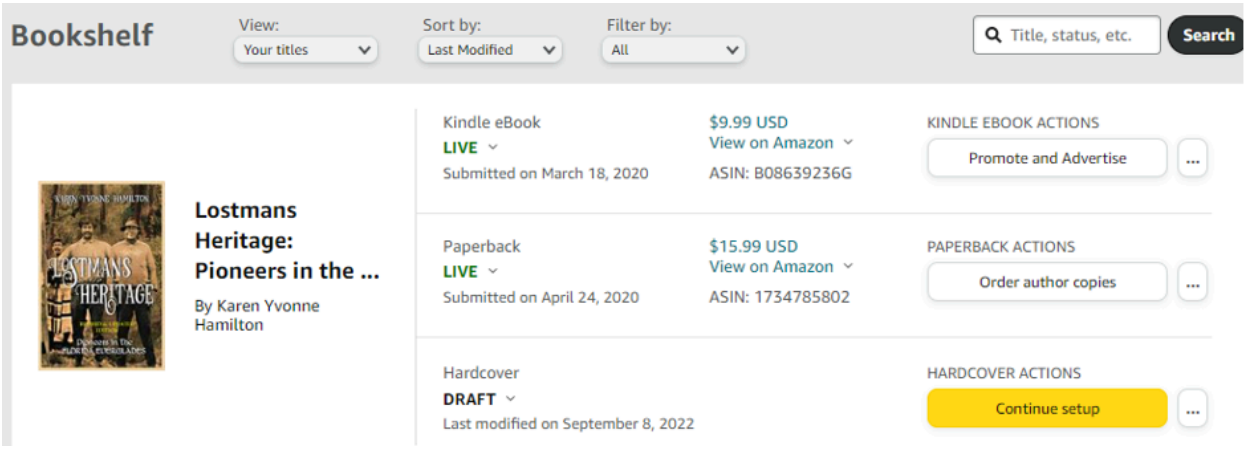
You can create and sell your print version and your digital version through KDP.

When people search for your book on Amazon, they will come to a sales page that shows BOTH versions of the book.

Amazon has a lot of good marketing tools for you too.

kindle direct publishing

https://kdp.amazon.com



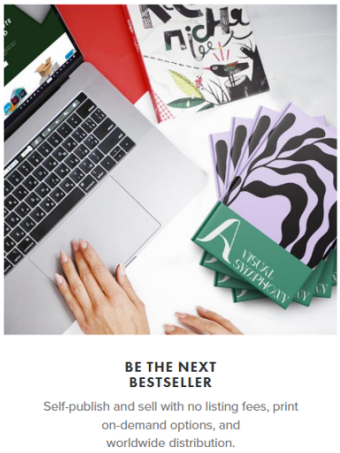
## Blurb

Blurb is good for print photo books of your vacation or for books that are heavy in photos.

Digital books cost you $9.99.

You can then sell them on Blurb in your own storefront.

Blurb gives you a widget to embed wherever you wish to direct customers to your storefront where they can preview and/or purchase your book.

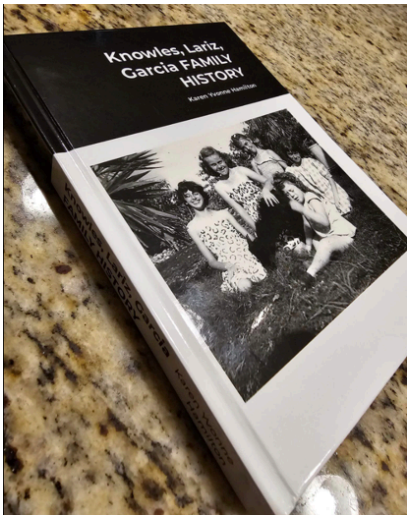



https://www.blurb.com/

## Lulu

Books published on Lulu are sold all over the world, through most major bookseller venues.

Lulu keeps 10% of the profit, but the wide range of exposure is worth it.




https://www.lulu.com/

## A Note on Pricing Your Book

New authors typically set their book prices very high – and sell very little.

You want to start out by setting your book at a low price point to increase the numbers of readers you get.

It is essential to sales to get the book out there AND reviewed. Think about your own buying habits. Are you going to pay $24.99 for a book with no following and no reviews? Probably not.

Set the price low to start with. My first run of a book is usually set to a price where I receive about $2.00 profit for a sale. Once the reviews start coming in and I have a following, I slowly increase the price.

**Think about this.**

Would you rather sell 10 books at $24.95 and receive about $13 profit ($130) or sell 100 books at $12.99 and receive about $5 profit ($500)?

Lower the price!



## PROOFREAD, I beg you!

I have read some beautifully crafted stories – many of them free – but they are not going to make it because NO ONE PROOFREAD THEM!

One or two typos are not so bad, but I find it so disheartening to read a great story and get stopped in my reading 'flow' over and over again by grammatical errors and typos.

I won't read anything more from that author because it was just so draining to wade through all the messy sentences.



# Memory Sparkers




- Tell about the worst fight/argument you ever had.
- Where did you spend your honeymoon?
- Write about a gift you once received that had special meaning for you.
- Write a bit about your favorite toy as a child.
- What was your favorite book as a child? Why?
- What is your favorite book as of today? Why?
- How did you choose your profession or career?
- If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?
- What is the one thing you regret most in your life?
- Talk about some things in this world that annoy you.
- What is the one thing in the world that couldn't be paid to do?
- What is the most bizarre thing you have ever seen?
- What is the most important lesson you would like to share with future generations?
- What event in history has always intrigued you?
- Tell about your most joyful life experience.
- Write about some of the things your parents used to say.
- If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?
- Talk about your saddest life experience.
- What do you think the meaning of life is?

- List some things that you are disappointed about.
- What are some rules that you have broken?
- What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do?
- What was your most memorable holiday experience?
- When and how did you learn the truth about Santa Claus?
- Did you ever build a playhouse, fort, or treehouse?
- Did you ever lose something that was valuable to you?
- Were you ever locked out (or in) of someplace?
- When and how did you ever outsmart someone?
- Did you ever perform in front of an audience?
- Did you ever stick up for a friend?
- Did you ever get lost?
- Did you ever run away from home?
- Draw a picture or describe in words (or both!) your childhood home.
- Write about a gift you once received that had special meaning for you.
- What was your most memorable holiday experience?
- What questions would you like to have answered?
- Where do you go when you feel you need to ‘get away from it all’?
- Write an unsent letter to someone who has annoyed you or you are still angry at.
- What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do?
- What makes you sad?
- Where do you stand spiritually? Do you believe in God? Talk about the feelings you have toward spirituality.
- Finish the sentence, “I’ve never told anyone that…”
- At what age did you feel you had finally grown up?

## Need Additional Help?






Karen Yvonne Hamilton is the author of *Lostmans Heritage: Pioneers in the Florida Everglades*, the story of her pioneer ancestors. It is an historical account and also a journal chronicling the author's journey through research, interviews, field trips, and all the frustrations and triumphs that go with historical and genealogical research. The book follows Hamilton's slave ancestors from Savannah to the swamps of the Ten Thousand Islands, in the heart of the Florida Everglades. Along the way she uncovers secrets and stories, polygamy, bootlegging, fist fights, murders, gangsters, killers, and tales of tomahawks and missing schoolteachers.

Hamilton holds a BA in English and an M.Ed in Education and taught high school and college prep English for 20 years before retiring in 2023. She now enjoys helping others write their family histories and painting.




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