

WRITING YOUR MEMOIRS

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A. Questions to ask yourself:

1. Who is your audience? Are you writing for your family and close friends? Your community, neighbours and work colleagues? The wider public - province residents, anyone who picks up your published or self-published book at a library or bookstore?
2. How would you like to organize your text? Straight time sequence from your early days, to youth, adulthood, career, marriage and family, later years? Or by a series of separate but engaging events and experiences each self contained, and standing out in your memory?

B. Things to Avoid writing about:

3. Daily repeated activities, necessary but uninteresting: "I got up, dressed. ate breakfast. went to school, work, etc."
4. Writing all your episodes in one intense mood: sadness, unfairness, triumphant achievement, repeated feelings of failure. Balance the emotions to give the reader a sense of the different moods experienced at different times.
5. There is no need to write about: skeletons in the closet (family secrets); very painful experiences that you do not want to relive, especially if you don't want anyone to know about them; or moments of sinfulness or shamefulness which do not reflect the major part of your personality. Decide what you want to leave out and NOT remember.
6. Write from your heart and edit from your head. Everything you write should have an emotional base. An event, a stage of life you enjoyed; a frightening experience; a meaningful relationship; a loss that you suffered and the meaning that person or object had for you; a skill you mastered; a pastime that gives you satisfaction; a wish you had that was never fulfilled.

C. The Memoir Writing Group will spend the first 30 minutes discussing What to Write, in regard to the above questions and suggestions. The next 15 minutes, participants will make an outline to organize their memoir using their choice of time sequence, or memorable events. The next 15 minutes participants will write a part of their memoir: e.g., "First memories as a child" or "The summer I stayed with my grandparents" or "I rescued someone from drowning". Authors will read aloud some of these depending on time.

D. Before the next session, participants will spend some of their free time writing at least one page of Memoirs, focusing on one time period or one experience, to be read at the second session.

The experience of writing Memoirs will be discussed, with problems, questions and answers shared by the group.

E. Warning: Writing Memoirs can bring up painful memories as well as happy times. Sometimes you can turn the painful memories into positives - by realizing what you had, as well as what you lost; or what you learned from a bad experience. Or how strong you are to have coped.