

# A note about the *Lifescapes* process

Normally we would spend months as a group meeting regularly to discuss and develop our collective writing skills, brainstorming ideas and staying motivated to write, review, revise, review, revise (until we get it the way we want it), polish, and finally publish. Like this:



Well, some things don't have to change. This booklet was created to help you start your memoir writing process by reconnecting you with all sorts of events from your life. Don't worry if you can't answer everything; just do your best to answer the prompts carefully and honestly.

# Let's get in the right mindset. What is a memoir?

A memoir is a memory that has been given meaning by the author.

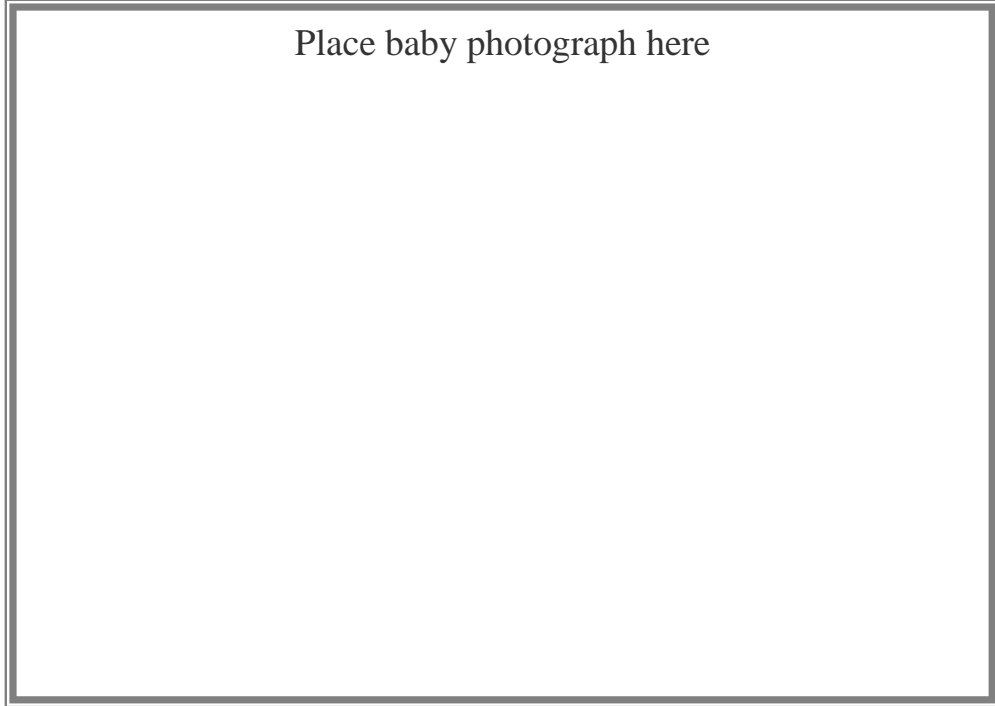
It is a piece of autobiographical writing, but it is not the entire story of a life. Memoirs are more about emotional truth than fact checking, about capturing certain highlights or meaningful *moments* in the author's life.

## **Common Characteristics of the Memoir Form**

- Focuses on the past experiences of an author but with a theme connecting the memories.
- Focuses on a brief period of time or series of related events
- The author is usually the central character of the story but the author and the character are treated as two distinct entities. "Separating yourself as writer from yourself as protagonist will help give you the necessary perspective to craft the memoir as a story" (Barrington).
- Has a narrative structure, including many of the usual elements of storytelling such as setting, plot development, imagery, conflict, characterization, foreshadowing and flashback, and irony and symbolism.
- Includes the writer's contemplation of the meaning of these events in retrospect.
- Has an engaging, personal, conversational voice, usually written in the first person.
- It has a fictional quality even though the story is true. It has many of the characteristics of fiction, moving both backward and forward in time, re-creating believable dialog, switching back and forth between scene and summary, and controlling the pace and tension of the story.

With all that in mind ... let's bring up some old memories!

# Hello, World!



Name:

Birth Date:

Birth Place:

Mother's Maiden Name:

Mother's Birthplace:

Father's Name:

Father's Birthplace:

## **Your Birth**

Were you born in a hospital or at home?

If in a hospital, what was the name of the hospital and where was it located? If at home, what was the address?

How much did you weigh?  
Who was there?

Is there a story surrounding your birth?

What was happening in the world at the time you were born?

Were you named after someone?

Did you have a nickname?

Who gave you the nickname, and what was the inspiration?

## **Your Home**

What is your earliest recollection of home? Did you live in the city, out of town, or on a farm?

Is there a reason why your parents lived in this place?

Is this house still owned by your family?  
What happened to this home?

Can you describe this house?  
Which room did you feel most comfortable in?

How many homes have you lived in?  
What were the addresses?

Did you have a favourite home?  
Did it have a name?

## **Your Family**

List your brothers and sisters from oldest to youngest, with birth dates.

What kind of relationship did you have with your brothers and sisters?  
What is your relationship like now (if they are still living?)

What language(s) did you speak in your home? Any regional dialects?

How would you describe traditions & special occasions that you celebrated at home? (Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, returning from war, etc.)

Were there any other special family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.?)

Did you have any pets? Describe them.

## **Your Mother**

When and where was she born? Where did she grow up?

What kind of childhood did she have? Did she suffer hardships?

Describe your mother. Do you or any of your family resemble her?

What else can you say about your mother? Did she have any special talents or abilities? What was her personality like?

How did she support herself and/or the family?

## **Your Father**

When and where was he born? Where did he grow up?

What kind of childhood did he have? Did he suffer hardships?

Describe your father. Do you or any of your family resemble him?

What else can you say about your father? Did he have any special talents or abilities? What was his personality like?

How did he support himself and/or the family?



## Your Parents

When did they meet? Where and how did it happen?

Do they have a marriage story? Where did it take place? Who was in attendance?

How did your parents handle hardships (financial, physical, emotional etc.?)

If your parents have passed, how, where and when did they die? How did this affect your life?

Is there anything about your parents you would like to share with future generations (great accomplishments, character traits etc.?)

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## **Your Grandparents**

What were your father's parents' names? Include birth dates and birthplaces if you can.

What were your mother's parents' names? Include birth dates and birthplaces if you can.

Were you able to spend time with them?  
Do you recall one or two special times you spent with grandparents?

What do you remember most about them?  
Were there any stories they told you that you can share?

Looking back to past generations in your family, were there any events that shaped your family history (wartime, depression, hardships, events in history?)

**More Family Memories**

## **Memories of School**

Name the schools you attended and their locations.  
What grade was your favourite and why?

Did you have a favourite teacher? Least favourite teacher? What did they do to make you form that opinion of them?

What was your favourite subject? Least favourite subject? Why?

Were you involved in sports or other activities?  
Were you ever in a theatre production or choir?

Who were your friends? Do you still keep in touch with them?

## **Growing Up**

How old were you when you learned to drive? What kind of vehicle was it? Who taught you?

What were the fashions when you were a teenager? Hairstyles, clothing, jewelry...?

When you went out with your friends or on a date, where did you go?

Who were your closest friends when you were a teenager?

When did you move out of your parents' home? Was there a specific reason why you left?

When you left home, what were your greatest challenges?

## **Love and Marriage**

How did you meet your future spouse? Was it love at first sight?

How old were you when you met each other? How long was your courtship?

Describe the type of things you did and places you went when you were dating.

Were there any dating rules? Did you have a curfew or other restrictions?

Describe the marriage proposal.

Describe your wedding. What was the date? Where was it held? Describe what you wore.

Who were the maid of honour, the bridesmaids, the best man, and the ushers?

Where did you live when you first got married? How much did you pay for your first home/apartment? How long did you stay? What kind of memories do you have of that place?

What kind of relationship did you have with your in-laws?

How did you resolve problems in your marriage?

What kind of activities did/do you and your spouse take part in? Social, sports, crafts, hobbies, friends, travel...

What do you think makes a happy marriage?

If your spouse has died, at what age and how did he/she pass away?  
How many years had you been married?

If you had the chance to do it all over again, what qualities would you look for in a partner?

What are some special moments in your marriage? Birth of children, trips together, spending time together ...

Did/do you have a special song? Wedding song, anniversary song...

## Children

What are the names of your children? When and where were they born?

What do you remember about their births?

What stands out in your memory about the birth or early years of any of your children?

Is there someone who gave you advice in raising your children, perhaps your own parents or older family friends? Was it good advice?

Did you have any major health concerns about any of your children?

What was the best thing about being a parent?

What was the hardest thing?



Were there any special challenges? Were the teenage years particularly hard?

If you could live these years over, what would you change?

What special memories did your childhood home(s) hold for you?  
Where was it located? How big was it? What did it look like?

What would you say were the most important rules and values you tried to instill  
in your children? E.g., love, compassion, hard work ...

## **Things I Want My Children To Know**

## **The Military and War Years**

Did you serve in the military? What years did you serve?  
What was the name of your regiment? What was your rank and regimental no.?

Where were you stationed? Where did you serve? How old were you?

Did you see action during wartime? If so, where? Were you wounded?

What effect did the war have on your life? Did the war change who you were as a person?

What did serving in the war mean to you?

## **The Military and War Years**

Were you awarded any medals or citations?

Did any of your family or friends die in the war? How did this affect you?

How do you feel now about your participation in the war? As you look back, is there anything you would like to say about that time in your life?

What did you do to help the war effort? Rationing, building aircraft, training etc.?

If you fought in specific battles, where would one look to find more information? Books, movies, journals, etc.

## **Memories of the Working Years**

What was your very first job? What was the pay? What hours did you work? How did you get the job?

What made you choose your career? Was it a family related choice? Did you go to school for it?

What were some of your job accomplishments? Promotions, awards, perks ...

Do you do any volunteer work? Did volunteering have an influence on your life?

If you could do it all again, would you make different choices?

List all of your employers and what positions you held.

What was the best job that you had? What was the worst job? Why was one so rewarding and the other not so good?

Do you have any fond memories of people that you worked with? Did you keep in touch with co-workers over the years?

Do you have any career advice to share?

## Vacation Travel

What is your favourite vacation memory? Where did you go? Who did you go with? Why was it your favourite?

When you were growing up, did you have a cabin or a special place you would travel to on a regular basis? Who would go? Was there a reason for traveling to this destination?

What was the most beautiful place that you have visited? What makes it the most beautiful?

When was your first airplane flight? What was your destination? How did you feel about flying? What type of aircraft was it?

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?

## **Leisure Time**

What were/are your favourite hobbies or interests? Are they the same now as they were when you were younger?

Did you have any special animals or pets that hold a special place in you heart? Name these pets and tell some favourite memories about them.

If retired, how did you accept retirement? Was it challenging or an opportunity for more time for you?

Is there a hobby or craft that you would have liked to take up bur never did? What was the reason for not doing it?

Were/are you involved in service clubs? How long have you been involved?



## **Grandparenting**

How many grandchildren and great-grandchildren do you have? Name them and their parents.

Do they live close by? Do you see your grandchildren/great-grandchildren often?

What do your grandchildren call you? Is this a family nickname that you called your grandparents?

What are your hopes and dreams for your grandchildren?

As a grandparent, what would you like your grandchildren to remember about you?

## **Things I Want My Grandchildren/Great-Grandchildren To Know**

## Your Life

What were the best years of your life?

What do you wish you had done that you never got a chance to do?

Is there a time in your life that was especially hard, maybe a time when money was hard to come by?

Is there anything about your life that you would change if you could?  
Were there any relationships that ended because of something you did?

Are there any great moments in your life that, if you could, you would like to re-live?

If you could have had more of something, what would it have been? Love, money, freedom, skills, etc.?

What traits do you admire in others? Honesty, integrity, ability to speak languages, etc.

What traits do you know that you possess?

Who or what influenced you most in your life? Parents, friends, mentors, life-changing events, etc.

Would you say that you have been lucky in life? Why or why not? Would you say that you “reaped the rewards” of hard work?

## **My Favourite Things**

Colour

Flower

Place

Season

Food

Famous Person/Hero

Beverage

Animal

Song/Hymn

What is the most amazing thing you have witnessed during your lifetime?

What is the worst thing you have witnessed during your lifetime?

**I Would Like My Family To Know....**

## More Ideas for Your Writing

One of the happiest times in my life was ...

One of the saddest times in my life was ...

I came to the important realization that ...

I realized I was no longer a child when ...

The best birthday present I ever received was ...

My favourite holiday is ... because ...

My favourite place is ...

## More Ideas for Your Writing

When I was little, I used to ...

I was proud of myself for ...

I was ashamed of myself for ...

I have never been as engrossed in learning as when ...

I spent time with someone who was much different from me when ...

A time when I decided to do something differently from everyone else around me was ...

The person who has had the biggest influence on me is ...



An experience that challenged me was ...

One of my biggest successes was ...

One of my biggest failures was ...

I realized that I had a talent for ...

The worst thing that has ever happened to me is ...

I was in grave danger when ...

**Dares and Adventures:** Have you taken/given dares? Paid the consequences?  
Regretted your actions? What are some of your adventures, great & small?

**Ideas & Ideals, Causes & Commitments:** What are the central moral, ethical, & spiritual values that you've held in your life: Where did they come from? How have they been tested?

**Traditions/Maxims/Advice:** Ok, so your kids & grandkids never take your advice. Put it down anyway, along with the experiences that generated it. Maybe somebody will read and even listen!

**Possessions:** Favourite possessions you enjoy, stories about what makes them precious.

**Formative Events:** These events helped shape me into who I am today.

**Forgettables (not):** Sometimes isolated, sometimes not, we all have times we would like to forget but cannot. List yours.

## And Finally....

**Miscellaneous:** (*Of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings...*): We are by human nature storytellers. Go back through your notes and put down the rough outlines of the key stories you think you want to share with others.