

Ledoux helps writers get off to a great start. - *ALA Booklist*

S HOULD I WRITE MY MEMOIR?

CHOOSING WELL

Denis Ledoux

A Memoir Network Writing Book

SOLEIL PRESS

Should I Write My Memoir?

How to Start

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[The Memoir Professional's Blog](#)

A Thank-You Gift

I hope you will enjoy this book. As a thank you for placing your trust in me, I am gifting you with a free membership in the Memoir Network's *My Memoir Education*.

Membership advantages include a ten-part memoir-writing e-course, e-books, and dozens of MP3s, including interviews with prize-winning memoirists to inspire and guide you.

When you sign up for your free membership, you'll also receive *The Lifewriter's Digest*, our newsletter, that will keep you focused on the memoir conversation.

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We hope you enjoy *Should I Write My Memoir?/How To Start* and feel, as we do, that it's a great tool to use as you assess whether you should write your memoir and, ultimately, how you should begin your writing journey.

A Word about *The Memoir Network Writing Series*

[*The Memoir Network Writing Series*](#) will help you to write more easily and voluminously. In a number of short, laser-focused e-books, you will access hands-on solutions to a number of writing challenges writers face—writers just like you and me.

We understand that you may have hesitations and insecurities about one aspect of writing while, when it comes to another aspect, you are confident and skilled. You are not looking for an encyclopedic overview of writing: you need a specific solution to a specific problem.

The Memoir Network Writing Series is all about just-in-time learning.

While we are specialists in memoir-writing, our coaching and editing has included a variety of other genres: fiction, how-to non-fiction, creative non-fiction, even poetry. We feel *The Memoir Network Writing Series* can address the needs of many different sorts of writers.

Each of our books in *The Memoir Network Writing Series* provides easy-to-follow processes for optimizing the writing process.

As of early 2015, the following is a list of books in our catalog or proposed for our catalog. To be alerted to publications as they become available, become a member of the free [My Memoir Education](#). As a member, you receive many gifts, one of which is our newsletter, *The Lifewriter's Digest*.

1. *How to Go Beyond Writing Prompts / Answering Real Questions*
(February 2015)
2. *Should I Write My Memoir?/How to Start* (Success—this book is in your hands!)
3. [*Don't Let Writer's Block Stop You / How to Push Beyond Stuck*](#)
(November 6, 2014)
4. *Write to the End / Eight Strategies to Thrive as a Writer* (March 2015)
5. *How to Structure a Memoir or Any Non-Fiction Book* (April 2015)
6. *The Memoir Seizure: Four Writers Talk About Writing a Memoir*
(Working title: May 2015)
7. *How to Write With Passion and Sustain the Muse* (June 2015)

Chapter 1

Are Your Reasons to Write Good Enough?

Just as with so many big projects in life, you'll benefit by taking a moment to consider why you ought to be writing this memoir of yours that is intriguing you and what role you anticipate it will play in your life.

1. Do you have a solid reason to write a memoir?

In late autumn of 1988, as people were hunkering down for another Maine winter, I was asked to read from my first collection of short stories ([*What Became of Them*](#)) to a meeting of volunteer Foster Grandparents.

My collection clearly made use of autobiography—the approach to fiction that has always compelled me the most. Several dozen men and women, sitting at long tables, many smiling in recognition of elements in the stories I had just shared, said in one way or another, “These are people just like us!” They seemed to recognize the child climbing the apple tree at the edge of the meadow or to glimpse once again their own parents in the tired women and men trudging through the tenement district on their way back from the textile factory.

“Most of the basic material writers work with is acquired before they reach the age of fifteen.”

— Willa Cather

After my short program of reading from my book of short stories, as has been my custom, I asked people to share their own stories with me and with each other. An astounding—but, as I was to find over and over again, completely natural—response occurred. In a torrent, members of the audience began to tell me their lifestories. These Foster Grandparents spoke with eagerness—as if their speaking their stories were, at last, satisfying a hunger of long standing. Or, perhaps it was a need to preserve their story, to achieve some snippet of immortality if only in the telling to their fellow Foster Grandparents.

Their memories were set in a number of countries around the world and in a variety of cultures within the US. As people spoke, some grew animated while others exuded peace. Some spoke with pride; others with sorrow. All, however, seemed to need to tell the stories of their lives and of their families.

Once again, storytelling had “primed the pump” of memory to enable personal and family stories to pour out. After my reading that day, I left for home feeling justified in my faith in the primal function of storytelling to affirm and reaffirm meaning in our lives.

Like the Foster Grandparents, if you need to write—or tell—lifestories because you need to establish a “monument” to your experience in the “city park” of your memory—and of the world’s memory—then you have a reason that may well see you to the end.

I have come to also realize something more about writing, something that is a

corollary of this need to be public: telling your story to yourself (in the privacy of your office, for instance) does not satisfy that hunger to tell. **People need to tell their stories to an audience.** Sometimes that audience is your own family; sometimes that audience is much larger—as large as a city, a region, a whole country, or even the world.

Besides starting to write a memoir that records the story you so much want to tell, part of what you need to do (and I am going to guide you in doing this) is starting to address who the audience for your memoir will be. This can be considered in two ways:

~ *who* needs to hear your story?

~ whom do *you* need to share this story with?

Our ancestors told stories around the campfire. They did not tell stories just for themselves, sitting in the woods far from others: they told stories to an assembled group because they understood that telling and hearing were part of a process.

Yes, it can be intimidating to realize that your words are going to be read by an audience of real, live people—people who, in some cases, will criticize you. But, these real people—both those with appreciative remarks and those with cutting riposts—are part of your writing experience.

If you want to write for an audience, don't let fear stop you. Pursue your dream of sharing your story.

Action Steps

1. Why do you want to write a memoir? You can get a bit philosophical here. Compose a lengthy response. A short answer will be insufficient. You can consider this to be your mission statement. Do you wish to:

- ~ Preserve a bit of history?
- ~ Set the record straight?
- ~ Celebrate your achievement?
- ~ Show “the way” to other people?
- ~ Other?

2. Prioritize the above goals according to their importance to your drive to persevere and write to the end.

3. The flip side of writing for an “other centered” reason is to write just for yourself. As you begin the process, while you keep others in mind, you can also give yourself permission to write without committing yourself to publishing your story. Most writers want some sort of publication (making public), but let it be ok to write for yourself. Writing for awhile without an audience in mind can be reassuring to the nervous writer.

4. Place your writing from this exercise—and all subsequent exercises—in a three-ring binder. (Print a copy if you have been writing on a computer.)
