

#### ****The following is an article submission on writing life stories.  The author, Denis Ledoux, is available for interviews. He is the director of The Memoir Network, http://TheMemoirNetwork.com. Photos are available upon request or on the website.****

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***Ordinary People Explore the Rewards of Writing a Memoir***

**by Denis Ledoux**

More and more ordinary people—not only presidential candidates and popes—are discovering that memoirs make a meaningful legacy to leave to the next generation and that writing them is a rewarding endeavor with many benefits for families and communities.

"I've never met a person who couldn't turn personal and family stories into interesting, well-written accounts," asserts Denis Ledoux. He is the author of *Turning Memories Into Memoirs, A Handbook for Writing Lifestories,* a book that has helped tens of thousands of people from all educational, ethnic, and social backgrounds to put their lifestories into writing.

"When you write your stories, you're doing more than preserving an account of the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when*. You are also affirming and celebrating your hopes and dreams by rediscovering the *why* and *how* of your life. Writing often leads to insight and self-understanding that bring peace and even healing. Of course, some insights and some stories may be too personal to share. But there is much your grandchildren will never know about you and their heritage unless you remember—and write it."

Writing a memoir is a significant undertaking with tremendous rewards, not just a sensational pastime for the rich and famous. The memory of every life, says Ledoux and the hundreds of memoir professionals who use his method and materials, is worth being written. Imagine if your grandparents had written their stories, how valuable their thoughts and life experience would be to you.

You, your children, and all the generations to come will benefit when you write down the story of your life.
“Now—the present—is a great time to write a memoir. We are making all sorts of print and audio material available free on our [website](http://www.thememoirnetwork.com/).”

Denis Ledoux, who leads a team of coaches, editors, and ghostwriters, maintains that writing down your stories isn't hard at all, though people often feel at first that it may be too difficult for them to undertake.

"Don't allow that 'I can't possibly' attitude keep you from this rewarding experience. The right start will keep you motivated, and a few easy-to-follow guidelines will keep you focused and productive. Like most people, you'll find that the main task is organizing your memories around themes or eras. It also helps if you give up the idea that every word from your pen or keyboard has to be golden and perfect. When you are writing your memoir, it's not the Pulitzer Prize you're going for! You are going for legacy."

"We each store a unique treasure trove of valuable experience and insight in our memories," said Ledoux. "It's a loss for the whole community when that treasure is allowed to fade away."

Among the must-do steps he offers in the sequential on-line program, [*Write Your First Memoir Draft*](https://thememoirnetwork.com/write-your-first-memoir-draft/), Ledoux offers these step-by-step suggestions

**1. First, make a**Memory List—a list of all your life's important events and relationships. Your Memory List can have hundreds of items. When you sit down to write a story, you'll have this list of topics handy.

The Memory List helps you to focus on things that deserve the most attention. It also primes the pump of memory: the more you write, the more you'll remember. Your list will grow as you write! At first just jot things down. As the list gets longer, organize it chronologically. With your Memory List handy to write from, you will never again suffer from "writer's block!"

**2. Start anywhere you feel like starting.** Choose your most important or interesting MemoryList item. Write anything you want to about it. Resist the urge to write "from the beginning." Instead, write whatever you want and put it into chronological order later.

The most important step in lifewriting is to start writing. Concentrate on one story at a time, not on your life as a whole. Remember: inch by inch, it's a cinch! Yard by yard, it's hard!

**3. Use all the props you can:** letters, diaries, obituaries, photos, newspaper articles, etc. You might just not be as much of an expert on your own lifestory as you think—memory can be tricky!—so interview people who were there to crosscheck your facts and dates.

Research your locale, your region, the era, history, etc., to give authenticity and context to the personal story you tell. Add a lot of general ingredients to season your personal stories! (For instance, "In those days, most Swedish immigrants did... My great grandfather must have done the same thing, too.")

**4. Tell the truth.** You and your roots are okay no matter what. You don't need to prove your worth, improve on the true story, or be afraid to reveal your past. Lifewriting is an exploration, a celebration, not an occasion to get even with people, or to alter things. At the same time, you also have a right to your privacy.

It may be growthful to tell the truth about a certain event, but it's perfectly okay to be selective about what stories—if any—you share with others. Your stories may be written but they don't all need not be made public! You can write just for yourself some or all of the time.

**5. Always be specific.** Use proper names, give dates, describe in detail. You can't give too many details! Don't use vague or general adjectives or adverbs. (What does "nice" mean?) Use all five of your senses to help the reader see, smell, touch, hear, and even taste the moment as it was lived. Remember: Show, don't tell. Present your story with specific action, dialog, and setting.

**6. Set a**schedule**for yourself.** Honor your writing time as you would any important appointment. (Ask your family to support this commitment, if necessary.) Writing regularly is more important than writing for long periods at one sitting. Marathon sessions with long spells between won't help you to establish the habits or gain the satisfactions of writing the way frequent, shorter sessions will.

**7. Create the props you need to support your new creative project**: a writing desk, a cup of coffee, photo albums close by, quiet time, a writing buddy who is also writing lifestories. Above all, be patient and enjoy yourself. Writing your stories is a valuable activity to invest in, a wonderful way to celebrate your life.

“Good luck,” says Ledoux in conclusion. “By following the above suggestions, you can succeed in leaving a written legacy.