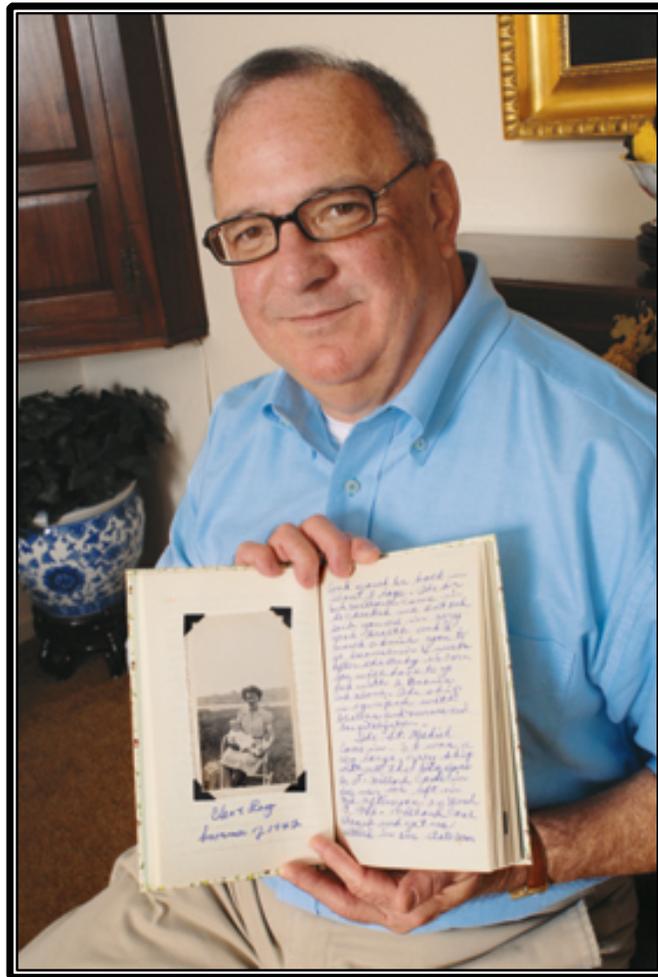


Turn Memories Into Memoirs Spring 2007 Out Here Magazine



Photography by Jacquelyn Martin

Ray Floyd's mother, Cleo, left behind a treasure of memories and photographs when she filled a journal with her life story.

It's simple to tell your own family story

By Hannah Wolfson

When Ray Floyd's mother died in 2005, she left behind a book full of memories.

In a neat, slanted hand, the flowered journal tells the story of Cleo Floyd's childhood in rural Alabama and trip to Alaska during World War II. It was a wonderful gift, says Floyd, a genealogy fan and memoir writer who talked his mother into putting her own experiences to paper.

"We were always fascinated by what she did," says Floyd, of Vestavia Hills, AL.

Whether you dream of publication or just want to record a few precious moments for your grandchildren, writing your life story is a great way to tell your own family story.

And it's easier than you might think, says Denis Ledoux, author of *Turning Memories into Memoirs: A Handbook for Writing Lifestories*.

Ledoux, who conducts memoir-writing workshops from his home in Lisbon Falls, Maine, has a few tips:

Don't begin at the beginning. Start writing anywhere you want. It could be a conversation, a moment of action, or even a description of a room. Ledoux urges writers to keep a three-ring binder and move scenes around as their story grows.

"People feel they have to start writing at the beginning of the story," he says. "Oftentimes, a good beginning is written at the end."

Dig deep. Try to find the hero in your own life story. "Almost everybody that I've ever met, there's something about their lives some place that is a hero's journey," Ledoux says. "If you can identify that, then you can write the deeper story."

To do that, look for times of struggle, what you did to get through it and what that meant to you. That way, your life can provide a guide for the reader.

Be specific. Details make the story come alive to readers. Ledoux has writers create memory lists, or quick notes of everything they can remember about a particular moment or topic.

"You stimulate your memory so you have something to write about," Ledoux says. "It brings out details, gives writing a tangibility, and avoids writer's block."

Find time. Set a deadline and a specific time to write, such as every Saturday morning between 9 and noon. Writing just three hours a week equals 156 hours in a year.

Also, don't be afraid to get help, even if it means hiring a professional editor or coach. If you can't do that, consider joining a writing club, perhaps through your library.

Finally, Ledoux says, don't worry about getting it perfect the first time. It's important to start getting things down in a draft. Polishing can come later.

"None of us have as many tomorrows as we think we'll have," he says. "Start writing today."

Writer Hannah Wolfson lives and writes in Birmingham, AL.

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