

7 REASONS YOU HAVE TROUBLE WRITING YOUR LIFE STORY



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Greetings



I discovered as a college professor and author of my book, *Color Your Life Happy: Create Your Unique Path and Claim the Joy You Deserve*, that when you skip the sugar-coating and tell the pretty and painful parts of your story, people are relieved to discover they are not alone in their own uneven life journey.

My adventures as a teacher, wife, mother, author, entrepreneur, speaker, and world traveler, helped me enjoy and appreciate the rewards of helping others recall their memories and record their life stories to leave behind as personal legacies. I believe that only when you release the magic in your story can you embrace the beauty in your life.

I graduated from the University of Southern California with a B.A. in English, an M.S. in Education, and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. I enjoyed teaching junior high through university levels over a 40-year career.

I confess that I am a confirmed coffee snob with an unhealthy love of British murder mysteries and love music ranging from Ray Charles to Vivaldi. When I'm not writing, speaking or travelling, I guide people in writing their life stories or publishing their books.

To learn how to begin writing your life story, like my page on [Facebook.com/dr.florabrown](https://www.facebook.com/dr.florabrown)

You may also visit my website, [FloraBrown.com](https://www.florabrown.com), to get free eBooks and learn about my programs and upcoming appearances. Check out my books on my author page at [amazon.com/author/florabrown](https://www.amazon.com/author/florabrown).

Welcome

Have you been thinking about writing your life story, but you're not sure how to begin?

OR

Maybe you began writing your life story, perhaps years ago, but it seems disorganized and boring.

Whatever challenge you're having with writing your life story, this report will help you.

LET'S GET REAL.

Writing your own life story is tough for everyone.

Yes.

Even though I've been writing most of my life and taught English and critical thinking during my career, I was stumped when it came to writing my own life story.

It's not that I didn't try.

Before I retired, I began making efforts to start my story.

I combed the internet looking for articles and programs to get me started. One book suggested creating a notebook of lined paper with each page numbered for each day and month of your life. If you're 45 years old, that would be 450 pages. My eyes started to glaze over when I realized the magnitude of that project! Trying to recount a memory for each day of my past seemed overwhelming, to say the least.

Eager to encourage me, my oldest daughter gave me a journal-type book with 200+ prompts in it. They were designed to trigger memories that I would record on the pages.

I spent a few hours making entries in that book before becoming discouraged and abandoning that approach as well.

Eventually, I stumbled upon an approach to getting my life story written that is easy enough even if you're intimidated by your writing ability. In this technique, anyone can be guided to recall memories based on the life themes we all experience. This approach created by Dr. James Birren, founding dean of the University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, made me realize why I and others were having trouble writing my life story.

Let's walk through those seven reasons now.

7 Reasons You Have Trouble Writing Your Life Story

1. Waiting for the perfect time to start writing your story.

"Don't wait. The time will never be just right."-Napoleon Hill

Many students in my life story workshops confess they've wanted to write their life stories for a very long time.

Some have kept journals or diaries for decades; others have just thought about it but never started.

Familiar?

The perfect time to start writing your story is now. It's the only time we have.

2. Thinking your life story has to be like the best-selling memoirs or autobiographies.

One of the biggest errors we can make is comparing ourselves to people who have been honing their skills for many decades.

If you've enjoyed reading memoirs or autobiographies, you may think your life story has to be equal in quality and length. Cancel this thought or it will block you from ever starting or completing your own life story.

What you want to write may not even be a memoir OR an autobiography. Even though these two categories are grouped together by many booksellers, they are very different.

A **memoir** is your memory of a slice of your life. You could recount how you remember a happy period of your childhood or how you contracted and overcame a severe health challenge. Just remember that your memoir is how YOU remember and experienced the events in this segment of your life.

An **autobiography** is a formal chronological telling of your life, typically from birth to the present. It's considered a historical account where readers expect your facts to have been checked by you for accuracy. Although anyone can write an autobiography, of course, it is often written by people who have achieved some level of fame, recognition, or influence after a wide span of years.

Your life story does not have to be a memoir or autobiography. It is your account of various episodes of your life in no particular chronological order, often told around themes and always resulting in finding meaning in your life.

Your life story could be as simple as a one-page legacy letter or ethical will where you share advice, life lessons, and describe what values matter most to you. A life story could be left with your will and other financial papers, or published in paperback, audio or eBook form.

If you've traced the genealogy of your family, you may want to add photos and other documents to your life story and have that printed to go along with your family tree or genealogy chart for future generations.



The best part about writing your life story is YOU decide how formal or informal you want it to be. It does not have to fit the categories of memoir or autobiography.

If you have no interest in publishing your story for sale to the public, you've removed a lot of pressure and expectations. In this case, you get to by-pass many formal steps. Your finished story could be saved as a Word document, handwritten on notepaper, or in any format you wish. Then, you may store it with your important papers or share it with family and friend as you wish.

If you decide you want to publish your story for sale, of course, you may do so. In that case, however, you will need to put on a business hat and get your manuscript edited, formatted, and proofread like other published authors do.

3. Hesitating to start because you're intimidated by the writing process

No one is a born writer. Start writing your life story and you'll become a better writer as you go along. Besides, the content of your story will be more important to your loved ones than the quality.

I have a cookie recipe on a now-yellowed index card my grandmother handwrote and sent to my mother when I was a baby. This decades-old memory is very precious to me, complete with the few errors made by a woman who in her childhood was sent to pick cotton instead of attend elementary school.

Good writers are readers. If you want to improve your writing skills, read more. You could also take writing classes if you wish, but it's not mandatory. You become a better writer by reading and writing.

In the meantime, get started writing your life story.

Two quotes from Maya Angelou speak to writing ability

“Each time I write a book, every time I face that yellow pad, the challenge is so great. I have written eleven books, but each time I think, ‘Uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody and they’re going to find me out.’”

“Some critics will write ‘Maya Angelou is a natural writer’—which is right after being a natural heart surgeon.”

4. Fearing that your life has been dull.

I was having lunch with a few retirees, when one of them upon learning that I help people write their life stories said, “My life has been dull. No one would want to read it.”

Then within a few seconds of saying this, he added, “Now if you asked me what it was like to work at Disneyland for 30 years, I could talk all day long.”

“Then THAT is your life story,” I said to him.

TV and Hollywood productions, with all the fast action, music, skilled actors, and special effects have made many of us believe our lives are boring. That’s absolutely not true. Those fictional accounts are no comparison to the real experiences of our lives.

As you write your life story, focus on whatever times and events you wish, and you will begin to see beauty and meaning in things you once took for granted.

5. Being unclear about the purpose for writing your life story.

Telling your life story is for yourself, first and foremost. Just as journaling helps you capture your doings, your thoughts, and whatever interests you.

Writing your life story helps you learn more about yourself. As you begin to see your life in a new light, you gain confidence and increase in pride when you recall the barriers you’ve surmounted, and the hardships you’ve overcome.

You may discover that talents you once took for granted are precious gifts

You may be highly motivated to write your story to leave behind for your family and loved ones. That is the primary reason many people get started. But, deeper than that is the universal truth that we all want to know our lives have meaning, that we mattered. Completing your life story uncovers that meaning,

6. Hesitating to write your story for fear of hurting someone's feelings

Your job is to tell what happened to you in your environment from your point of view. It's like being an eye witness where you report what you observed, and most important, share how it made you feel.

You can't know how the other characters in your life felt or understand their motivations for their behavior. It's up to them to write their own stories.

You may add how you see things differently as you've gotten older, but you owe it to yourself to share your original authentic feelings too.

If you're from a family where it was taboo to share almost any accounts of what went on behind closed doors, you're not alone. Keeping some of those secrets caused some of us to struggle with shame throughout our adult lives, and delay getting the help we needed.

Other secrets reflect the insecurities of our parents and society during our childhood, not ours. And yet, if we have burdened ourselves with them for so long, it's time to expose them so we can be free ourselves from bondage they imposed on us.

You are not responsible for how others feel. If you let your fear of what others think drive your story, it will be bland fiction that even you won't recognize. If family members or others want to share a different version of experiences than what you shared, let them write their own stories.

Writing your life story helps you visit your memories and see how those experiences have affected, informed and shaped your life. Don't let anyone rob you of the empowerment this brings.

7. Trying to go it alone

Professionals who write for a living often work alone, but the rest of us can benefit from getting help and support from others. Fortunately, there are an growing number of groups, books, and programs around the world to help you get started and stay on course.

When I discovered the power of writing and sharing life stories in small groups, I completed the training program to become a Guided Autobiography facilitator. There is no comparison to the power of the feedback you get when sharing your story with others in a warm and safe environment. That's why I invite you to join ["Write Your Life Story, Two Pages at a Time."](#)

Here's what a few of my students shared:

The experience of working together in a small group, helped me capture one of my personal life stories from the memories of that time. The writing process reinforced the feelings of that choice during the time it happened. Then sharing our stories as a group, around the table infused my personal experience and memories with the affirmation and self-knowledge that I do make very good decisions. The process gives me confidence for even the very hard choices that I have personally had to make. Yet now I understand that each piece of this knowing adds to my self-trust. ~Louise Egan, Founder of Home Business Alliance

I had a great time. . . . Working closely with only a small group and our impressive instructor made it much easier to do the exercises and share our work. Everyone was very encouraging and supportive of each other and there was no pressure to write perfectly or to prove one's ability as a writer. The exercises leading up to the main assignment helped trigger memories and thoughts pertaining to the theme, which in turn made it easier to write on that theme when the time came to do so. . . . I left feeling encouraged, motivated, and excited to continue writing on my own, and even validated in my belief that my writing has merit. I would love to do it again and definitely encourage anyone who is interested to jump on this workshop. You won't regret it. ~Kristi G. Hicks

*What a truly memorable day you gave all of us. You are organized, respectful, incredibly knowledgeable, encouraging, and an absolute delight. I feel honored to have been taught by you today. I wrote about an experience I've not shared before because you made the group so safe. Thank you for bringing your teaching skills to my home today to share with all of us. I know we each felt touched in a way we'd not felt before. ~**Tessa Kershner**, Marriage and Family Therapist*

Closing Words



If you are ready to write your life story, but something is still holding you back, ponder this.

The little girl in the photo is my mother around age 3, standing beside her mother. Shortly after this photo was taken, her mother died in childbirth giving birth to my uncle. My mother grew up not having known much about her birth mother.

I often wonder what life must have been like for my grandmother, growing up in Arkansas in the late 1890's. I suspect she did manual labor, perhaps picking cotton as so many black Americans did in late 1800's. How did she meet my grandfather? What were her talents, her dreams, her beliefs, her joys, her fears?

I was blessed to have my mother actively engaged in my life and that of my siblings until she passed at 92. Even though we spent a lot of time together and I know quite a bit about her life, I imagine that if she had written about the things that mattered to her in her own words, it would be a priceless gift for me and now for my great grandkids who never got to meet her.

Some say we don't know what we really think until we write it down. We certainly won't remember many details. Even if you've taken many photos throughout your life, as I did, you probably can't recall many of the details even if you made notes on the photos.

Visit my website at florabrown.com/write-your-life-story-overview for details on the life story workshops, soon to be available online so that geography won't be a barrier. In the meantime, also join <https://www.facebook.com/groups/yourlifestorymatters> and let me know if you have questions or concerns.