The Story of Your Life

By M. David Bradshaw

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How to Craft an Inspiring Autobiography for Posterity

Everyone has a book inside of them, but it doesn't do any good until you pry it out. -Jodi Picoult, bestselling author



Class 1 - Introduction

If we don't invest the time to write out our life story, no one else will!

This would be a tragic waste of the wisdom we've each gained over a lifetime which could potentially help our family, friends and future generations best remember us after we graduate from this life to the next.

This booklet will focus on telling the story of your life as a collection of short memoirs, grouped chronologically in four basic categories; *1. Early Childhood*, *2. School/College*, *3. Marriage/Family/Career* and *4. Retirement*.

Readers/writers will be provided with a list of 155 prompting questions designed to help you focus and reflect upon key memories from each of four major seasons of life.

I recommend choosing 50–60 questions to write about for at least 15–30 minutes daily. By the end of the 8-weeks you will have a nice collection of 50–60 memoirs to form your autobiography.

Here are few sample memory-prompting questions:

- Write about your earliest memory. What do you see? Was anyone you with? Does it have a special meaning to you now?
- Describe your first job. How much did you earn? Were you a good employee? On good terms with the boss?
- Who has influenced your life the most? Why? How have you changed as a result of this person?

The goal of this class is to remember what has shaped your life so far, what you hope to accomplish in your remaining years and then presenting your finished autobiography to your loved ones as a keepsake for posterity.

The first assignment is to create a theme, or purpose statement for your autobiography. Taking a few minutes to reflect and then write down a short, one-paragraph life summary/obituary is a good starting point.

Why? Because this forces us to reflect upon (and condense) our entire lifetime into a single paragraph. In your own words you are telling your family (and the world) in a nutshell how you hope you'll be remembered.

While writing your own obituary may seem a bit morbid, the truth is that reflection upon our own death can provide us with added meaning to our daily life.

Here's a sample obituary I wrote when facing <u>my own mortality</u> in 2022:

Michael David Bradshaw (1953–2022) affectionately known as 'ideaman' passed peacefully of natural causes. His passion was helping others discover that they were created in love, as a reflection of the image of God. In his professional work as a financial writer he sought to help readers discern economic reality and grasp that true wealth transcends 'money'. His book reviews/songs expressed his joy in promoting closer relationships — both human and divine. David is survived by his four loving daughters, ten grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Your life purpose statement could be a single sentence or a paragraph. Having this as your central theme will help your short memoirs and autobiography flow together.

Additional help prompting your memories may also come from old photo albums, letters written/received from loved ones, favorite songs, or old home movies.

The Big Picture

Why Write Your Life Story?

The purpose of writing your autobiography is twofold;

- 1) To create a record of small snapshots of your life for your family and OTHERS to gain from your accumulated life wisdom, joys, sorrows and lessons.
- 2) To remind YOU of who you really are, by stimulating important memories of your life to help integrate your small self with your BIG True Self.

As we age it is vital that we invest some time reflecting upon what is most important to us. St. Augustine said, "Know Thyself". This life review also helps us resolve any fractured relationships, bitterness or unforgiveness we may be holding on to.

Reflecting upon the past helps us become more grateful in the present and hopeful about the future. Today, more than ever, our children and grandchildren are in need of true elders who can help them face the adversities of life they will face and encourage them about how we've overcome them during our lifetime.

Lastly, let your family and friends know you are doing this project and watch their faces light up. Likely they will even have some photos or information to add.

2. Resources Needed:

A 3-ring binder and 4 colored subject divider tabs. Some 3-ring punched lined paper...OR a laptop computer... OR a smart phone with voice mp3 recording to text capability.

To write a draft of your autobiography will require a commitment to answer about 50 prompting questions spanning your lifetime, arraigned chronologically, to form your autobiography. This can be done in a matter of 2-12 months, depending upon your time availability. If you write an hour a day and can finish 7 memoirs per week it would take a 60 days. If you write one hour per week it would take one year to finish 50 memoirs.

You could either save your digital autobiography document as a pdf and add new memoirs to over time, or publish it now and give a printed copy to your family/friends. It is the gift of a lifetime! Your lifetime!

Tips On Writing Well:

According to William Zinser in his book *On Writing Well* the four most important elements of writing non-fiction consist of:

- 1. **Clarity.** The goal in writing should be clarity. The key is editing and re-editing the first draft. If you can't make your point clearly, there's no reason to read it.
- 2. **Simplicity.** Avoid clutter and unnecessary words. Strip the sentences down of any fat and pretentiousness. A simple style represents very hard work.
- 3. **Brevity.** Writing is like a good watch, it functions smoothly with no extra parts to get in the way. Use short words instead of long word. Short sentences, rather than long ones. Short paragraphs. Most first draft can be cut by 50%.
- 4. **Humanity.** This is crucial. Be natural. Be conversational. Sound like yourself. Who you are is more important than the subject that you're writing about.

Writing is a craft, learning to use the tools of good English requires logical thinking. Writing is also hard and usually requires at least 3-4 rewrites to streamline it.

Writing is talking to someone on paper. Just like you would avoid putting on airs in speaking because they dilute the message and your authority, the same is true in writing. Learn to cut down your copy and enjoy doing it. Most readers can only process one idea per sentence.

All writing is a journey. You are asking the reader to go with you on a trip. Make it clear, interesting and enjoyable. And make it sound like who you really are.

Self-esteem and self discipline are critical in writing. Believe in yourself. Confidence is a vanishing commodity, so express your individuality. Develop good work habits. You learn to write by writing. The magic of a word processor is to be able to reimagine each sentence and paragraph.

Block out time to regularly. Write every day. Writing is also visual, short words and sentences are attractive and relate to our own lives.

Use active verbs versus passive verbs. (Walk, run, speak, launch, build). It will make your writing stronger and give it momentum. Passive verbs are dead and fuzzy. ("The ball was thrown by the pitcher" vs. "The pitcher threw the ball."... "The novel was read by Mom" vs. "Mom read the novel"

Use good nouns. Good writing can be likened to show-and-tell that reveals your deepest emotions. Good nouns could include: "house, home, sky, tree, crash, earth, chair, child." Words that bring on emotions. Bad nouns are words that are more ethereal, more concept-oriented, like "instruction and orientation," with 3 to 5 syllables. Never ask readers to ask themselves "What does this mean?"

Write about your passions, hobbies, work and travel. To write good English, read good English. Find the best authors/models in your field.

Listen to what you write. Read it aloud and you will hear repetition, clichés and cloudiness. Replace them with freshness and surprise.

There's nothing more interesting than the truth. Trust your material to make your point, rather than repeating and explaining your every point in detail.

Quotations add to the credibility. Learn the skill of interviewing others. Always be sincere and tell a story, keep it human.

Telling our own life story is one of the strongest human urges. The next generation tends not to be very interested in our stories until we are gone and it's too late.

Readers don't necessarily want every detail of our life, just the interesting chunks. To write good memoirs, you must become the editor of your life.

If an autobiography is the whole iceberg, memoirs are just the most interesting tips of the iceberg. They focus on a particular period of time or place.

Write with honesty. Memoirs are going through a renaissance right now. We live in confessional times, but too many victimhood memoirs are giving memoir writing a bad name.

Two things make for a good memoir, art and craft. Art involves the integrity of our intention, expressing our soul and being true to our own best self.

Craft involves good construction: peace, momentum, being interesting and coherent. A good memoir is grounded in some type of universal truth.

How to begin? Writing memoirs does not always follow a predictable road map that you make in advance. The art of writing, then editing, gradually reveals to you what your story is really all about.

Choose vivid memories. One episode of your life with a beginning, middle and end. The subconscious mind plays a big role in memoirs, because one memory often leads to another.

Consider your writing during the first few weeks to a month as the warm-up to help you find your voice and style. Decide what to leave out by keeping a unified theme intact.

Don't be in a hurry to find the size and shape of your memoirs. Let your memoirs find you.

Your First Assignment:

Your assignment the first week is to create a theme, or purpose statement for your autobiography and begin to write your memoirs.

Memoirs can be written in any order, from chronologically to starting with your most recent memories and then working backwards. The order that you decide to write your memoirs is completely your choice. You may discover while writing one memoir that it triggers memories of another stage of life. Keep the flow going.

Write on whatever comes to your mind and then file it in one of the four seasons of life in your 3-ring binder: 1. Early Childhood, 2. School/College, 3. Marriage/Family/Career and 4. Retirement.

I suggest choosing 12–15 prompting questions which strike you as good topics from each of the four section in the <u>155 Prompting</u> <u>Questions</u>.

I recommend setting aside a dedicated time of day to establish the habit of writing regularly. Feel free to add your own prompting questions if you prefer.

Review the entire list of prompting questions and begin choosing 12–15 questions from each of the four sections. That is the purpose of the 3-ring binder with a tab for each of the four life stages — to help you file your memoirs chronologically... *Good luck!*

Class 2: Early Childhood Memories

Writing early childhood memoirs can be a beautiful and reflective process, allowing you to capture and share the precious memories from your formative years. Review the list of prompting questions and choose 12-15 which resonate with you the most. Here are some tips to help you get started:

Take some time to reflect on your early childhood memories. Try to reconnect with your emotions and feelings from that time. Remembering how you felt during those experiences.

Consider choosing a central theme or focus for your memoir. It could be a particular event, a person who had a significant impact on your early life, or a series of related experiences that shaped who you are today.

Make a timeline of the key events and moments from your early childhood. This will help you organize your thoughts and ensure that you cover important aspects of your life during that period.

Use vivid and descriptive language to paint a picture of the settings, people, and emotions involved in your memories. Engage all the senses to transport your readers back to your early years.

If you can remember conversations you had with family members, friends, or teachers, include snippets of dialogue in your memoir. Dialogue can add life and authenticity to the narrative.

If you have old photographs or mementos from your early childhood, incorporate them into your memoir. These visuals can enhance the storytelling and make it more personal.

Share both the joyful and challenging moments of your early life. Being honest and vulnerable in your writing will make your memoir relatable and emotionally impactful. Discuss how certain experiences and relationships influenced your personal growth and learning during your early years. Highlight the lessons you learned and how they shaped your perspective.

Sometimes, the most meaningful memories come from seemingly insignificant moments. Pay attention to the small details that made your childhood unique and special.

Remember that memory can be fallible, and it's okay if you don't remember every detail with absolute clarity. Embrace the imperfections in your recollections; they are a part of the storytelling process.

Youth: Healthy Ego-Building

Our earliest experience as an infant is a magical time of connection, with both our mother as well as with our Creator, or as some call it "the Ground of Being." This is state of Divine union reflects our original goodness, purity and total surrender. It is this luminosity that is perceived and experienced in the presence of a new-born infant which parents witness at this earliest stage of self which evokes love.

At our birth we begin to build our ego and at our death (or a result of spiritual practices) we let go of our ego. As we grow, the egoself moves toward increasing differentiation, a dawning sense of me, as Kathleen Singh puts it in *THE GRACE IN DYING*.

This developing consciousness of the child establishes the "First Dualism" between self and not-self — very relevant because it also represents the final letting go stage of the dying.

This First Dualism launches us into a lifetime journey into ego building and spawns our concept of space and time. We begin to make distinctions between past, present, and future, which births the "Second Dualism" — the distinction between life and death.

These first two dualisms, which develop in early childhood, seek to divide and separate everything, our thoughts from our feelings, thus removing us from experiencing wholeness and the unquestioning place of Love from which we came.

Next comes the "Third Dualism" — between mind and body which is usually developed in the early to middle childhood years. According to Singh, "The loss is immense. We lose our deep integrity, the unity of body and mind, which is the unity of feeling and attention — the ability to be present."

The "Fourth Dualism" — our persona, is division between our acceptable self-image and the shadow self, which consists of all the parts of our self that we cannot see or that we disown.

"Our personal consciousness believes in its apparent independence and self-control." In early adulthood years "we become lost in our own dramas; we forget our Original Nature and goodness," writes Singh.

It is most interesting that the healthy ego-building of the first half of life is followed by a healthy ego-decline in the second half of life. Elders are able to see this full cycle of life from a much broader perspective and therefore have much to share with youngers that can help them become whole humans rather than dualistically fragmented, as so many are.

"The Glory of Family Love"

During our early education we learn everything from our ABC's to our 1,2,3s. This "beginners mind" allows children to gather lots of information, much of which they're unsure of how it will help them to navigate their future.

But, just as important as what we are taught in classrooms, is what we have caught from the lives of parents, grandparents and other elders.

"When young and old connect, it's like joining the poles of a battery. Together we generate energy for personal and social change that age-segregated society cuts off... the young yearn for us to take an interest in them, their fears, their dreams, and their futures," writes Parker J. Palmer.

Even before children begin to navigate elementary school subjects and socialization they begin to recognize their own personality, strengths and weaknesses. Unconditional family love is vital to child development.

"The glory of family love," writes C. S. Lewis in <u>The Four Loves</u>, "It unites those who would otherwise not come together... Family love teaches us first to endure, then to enjoy — affection causes us to notice the goodness in others."

During our pre-school days we also learn the value of friendship. True friendships are much more than mere companionship or comradery, usually involving strongly shared values and activities.

Later on parents' and grandparents' influence often fades as friendships and peer groups grow. Elder's have an opportunity to serve as youngers face growing pains, broken friendships and rejection. Another important part of youthful education is learning how to treat the opposite sex, dating and romance. Parents often set boundaries, which may or may not be adhered to. These precious years offer elders an opportunity to model for youngers a healthy healing of heartbreaks, forgiveness of bad behavior, as well as serving as a safe harbor of unconditional love.

'Fast Draft' Memoirs Overview

A memoir is a story about yourself, a slice in time, or theme-based. Memoirs should be based on truth, however, since no one's memories are infallible they can change over time. It is valid as long as the likelihood of a memory being at least an 80% representation of the truth.

Why right your first draft quickly? First drafts are always bad. This is why editing is so vital. Revising as you go is not a good method for most people. It's better to write fast, then revise/edit later.

How long is an average book of memoirs? It could range from 20,000 -100,000 words. An autobiography might consist of 40-60 memoirs of about 500-1,000 words which would be 25,000-50,000 words total. A daily goal of writing about an hour, should produce about 500 -1,000 words.

Types of memoirs. There's a great variety of categories; pastoral memoirs, celebrity, travel, spiritual, food, grief, animal/pet, dysfunctional family, escaping a cult. I will survive, love/romance, relationships, workplace/career, exploration, adventure, addiction, humor, a call to action.

No one wants to hear about your perfect life (that's boring) or about how you have become victimized.

Readers want to see our broken places and compare them to our own cracks. When we name our shame and go deeper we connect with others who resonate with our feelings.

The first step is to plan your memoir. It's important to have a beginners mind, to be open to new possibilities and let go with your expectations. Start small with a purpose statement.

Come up with a "six-word story," for example, "For sale, baby shoes, never worn." Or, in the case of my own autobiography, "The adventure, finding God's love everywhere."

The important part is capturing your unique essence and		
explaining how you've changed or evolved over time. For		
example, I started out	and ended up	This
is your character arc.		

Next, write a two sentence "elevator pitch" summarizing what you plan to cover in your memoir or autobiography.

For example, my autobio would be... "Our precious children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren need true elders who will help teach them how to overcome adverse circumstances by learning more about how we've overcame them. Understanding why what has happened in my small life matters and helps me focus on my larger, true life purpose: practicing unconditional love toward everyone and everything."

Writing the book. At first don't worry about the chronology. Set aside 45-60-minute blocks of time daily if possible. Your writing

will be better some days, worse other days, but don't trust your moods. Just keep showing up and getting it done. Shoot for your 500-1,000 word count target daily.

Real writers do not love writing, they hate it. The muse comes out as you do the work. Consider leaving home to write. Go to a park, the beach, library, or a local coffee shop. Avoid distractions of looking at your email or Internet surfing. Consider listening to music while writing.

Meditation is another useful tool in writing. Why? Because most people are not used to thinking about one subject for more than 60-80 seconds at a time. Focus is hard. Meditation is like pushups for the brain. Simply sit still, breath deep, when distracted, bring your focus back. If you can do this 5-10 minutes a day to establish a new practice that will help you write and have a more peaceful life.

Next, revise your first draft to make sure your story is true to the theme and overall message. Print it out at this point so that you can take a birdseye view. Don't worry about small edits or spelling at this point. That can be done later with a copy editor. Redo your story and perhaps add some setting details.

This is the best time in history to be a self-published writer, there's so many different varieties of ways to do it. When your draft is done, then hire someone for your final copy editing and cover design. A good program named Vellum (vellum.pub) for interior formatting of the book. Your story matters!

Sample Youth Memoir: When I grow up

As a youngster, my first recollection of what I would like to do was influenced heavily by my favorite TV shows like; Gilligan's Island, which brought to mind notions of learning how to survive living on a beautiful deserted island relying only on nature and my wits.

TV shows like Leave it to Beaver seemed to illustrate that being mischievous was both fun and had consequences. Andy of Mayberry, which starred my fellow elementary schoolmate Ron Howard. The show gave me the desire to live in a small town, rather than a suburb of LA. It seemed like a simpler lifestyle less stressful and always a happy ending.

My favorite show was The Man from UNCLE because it had lots of intrigue. I imagined living life as an international secret agent, like Napoleon Solo, who seemed the most exciting of all. I got my brother Kevin to play my perfect sidekick Illya Kuryakin, complete with his blonde hair he played a supportive role on all of our secret missions.

I remember spending hours cooking up missions that would take us from throwing dirt clods in empty lots to shooting at phantom enemies with plastic guns in abandoned buildings. We would, of course, always emerge as the victors and then head back home before dark and get ready to watch another episode on television.

I had several childhood jobs like mowing lawns and occasional babysitting, but those didn't seem to be jobs that would be in my future, they just allowed me to make a little extra money.

So far school failed to inspire me regarding what vocation I might be best suited for. It wasn't until my 13th birthday, when I was given my first guitar, that I began to dream of becoming a famous musician in a rock band. So I then set off to teach myself to play some of the popular songs of the mid-1960s like Pipeline, House of the Rising Sun and Michelle by the Beatles.

It would be a decade later before I played well enough to help lead music worship in small groups at church, but my lifelong love affair with making music was off and running. Five years later, at age 18, I accepted a job selling magazine subscriptions door-to-door. This was my introduction into the challenging world of direct sales.

I enjoyed meeting a variety of new people and trying to figure out which magazines best suited their hobbies. My success in sales led me to believe the whole world could be my oyster. I enjoyed finding new and creative ways to overcome objections. I learned the value of time management early on and the value of hard work - lifelong lessons that would serve me well.

Sample 2 – Youth Memoir: The hardest part of growing up

The hardest part of growing up for me was not having an actively engaged father as a role model who took an interest in my life, my interests and my future. In an era where both parents worked full-time, I'm not alone on this.

I remember wanting to learn from my step-Dad Keith, but it seemed like everything I tried to do, whether repairing something around the house or building something new, I was told to stay back and out of his way. I don't think it was always intentional to injure my self-confidence, but it hurt nonetheless.

Over time I stopped, asking to be his helper with any school projects or homework assignments. This also carried forward into

other activities, such as sports and other normal father-son activities which I saw most of my friends engaging in.

Of course, I would come up with other activities to fill the void, but my primary take away was that Dad was just too busy and/or too important to invest time in fathering me.

The net effect was that I began to think that the best way to cope with life without a father's love and guiding hand was to simply do what I felt was best without any counsel other than my friends. I also resolved that when that I became a father, I was going to be very involved with my children's lives.

In retrospect, I now have more compassion for Keith, knowing how difficult it can be to juggle education, work, play and family priorities as a young man.

I only met Keith's father Harry once or twice as a child. I believe Keith inherited his hands-off perspective of child-rearing from his father, who was also a regular drinker like Keith. Likely, Keith did the best he could, given the lacking model of his own father.

I think the idea that the sins of the father are often passed on to their children sadly is a truism, unless we undergo some type of spiritual transformation which can reveal a Heavenly Father who can help us to re-model our thinking and actions.

Class 3 - Education and Transformation

Reflect upon your experiences and memories from different stages of your educational journey. Each stage, from elementary school to college, presents its own set of challenges, growth opportunities, and cherished moments. Choose another 12-15 prompting questions, or come up with your own! Here are some key themes that could be included in memoirs from each stage:

Elementary School Memoirs:

Innocence and Wonder: Elementary school memoirs often revolve around the sense of wonder and innocence that children experience during these formative years.

Early Friendships: Recounting the adventures and misadventures with childhood friends and the impact they had on shaping one's personality.

First Academic Triumphs: Memories of learning to read, write, and solve basic math problems, and the pride that came with mastering these skills.

Funny Childhood Misunderstandings: Hilarious anecdotes of misunderstandings or misinterpretations that were common during the early years.

Middle School Memoirs:

Identity Exploration: The search for identity and self-discovery as students transition from childhood to adolescence.

Social Challenges: Exploring the complexities of navigating social hierarchies, cliques, and friendships during the turbulent middle school years.

Academic Pressure: Dealing with increased academic expectations and the challenges of balancing schoolwork with personal interests.

Awkward Moments: Reflecting on humorous or awkward moments that were typical of middle school experiences.

High School Memoirs:

Coming of Age: High school memoirs often center around the transformative journey from adolescence to adulthood.

First Love and Heartbreak: Exploring the highs and lows of teenage romance and the lessons learned from early relationships.

Personal Growth and Challenges: Reflecting on overcoming personal challenges, facing fears, and developing resilience during these pivotal years.

Lasting Friendships: Discussing the strong bonds formed with friends who became an essential support system.

College Memoirs:

Pursuit of Passion: Writing about the excitement of pursuing academic interests and extracurricular activities that align with one's passion.

Independence and Responsibility: Detailing the newfound freedom and responsibilities that come with living away from home for the first time.

Life Lessons: Reflecting on the life lessons learned through new experiences, encountering diverse perspectives, and facing academic and personal challenges.

Transition to Adulthood: Discussing the emotions and selfdiscovery that come with transitioning from a student to an adult.

It's crucial to infuse personal anecdotes, emotions, and reflections to create a genuine and relatable narrative. Memories of our education can be powerful tools for not only preserving personal memories but also offering valuable insights and wisdom to readers who may resonate with similar experiences.

From Living in Fear to Living in Love

Did you know the most common one-liner in the Bible is "Do not be afraid"? (365 times!)

It requires faith and love to overcome fear. But our school days can be full of fearful circumstances which can only be fully understood from a wider perspective later stage. This is why youngers need elders to reassure them that regardless of how difficult a crisis they face "this too will pass".

Elders who offer a written testimony of how they have survived (and hopefully overcome adversity) offers youngers something solid to hold on to during their storms of life — even if we cannot be there to hold on to them in person.

In our mature years we have a changed and expanded capacity to love — to hold both good and bad, light and dark with less anxiety and to transmit this ability to embrace paradox on to others around us. While youngers define themselves by

differentiation (or exclusivity), elders in contrast look for commonalities (inclusivity).

Youngers often stumble upon some very adverse circumstances which cause them to step back and rethink their life goals and face the reality of their so-called "shadow" or "false" self. This can be painful because this not-so-bright persona (or stage mask) is what we refuse to see about our self — and especially don't want others to see! Writing about both your biggest pleasures and biggest pains can be both healing and therapeutic for others.

Our false self-image (or idealized role such as mother, father, doctor, nice person, professor, etc.) can trap us into lifelong self-delusion. This is where the elder's second half of life wisdom and healthy self-critical thinking can help youngers see beyond their shadow's disguise to find their larger, real self.

Elders can model to young adults that true joy and freedom comes in giving to other. Why? Because as we mature there is no longer a big need to impress others with things, houses, travel or knowledge.

Elders can now become the "grand" parents to the world because children and adults feel safe and loved around them. Elders can help youngers see that education (learning more facts) is not the same as transformation (applying new information to affect a change of lifestyle)

From My Little Story to The Big Story

The two halves of life, as explained in detail by psychologist Carl Jung, reveals how young and old both need each other. Many in their 20s, 30s, 40s and even 50s are still so caught up in survival and seeking upward mobility in their job/career, future dreams

and busyness with children that they miss a great deal in the present moment as well as a focus on healthy child development.

"Our life is frittered away by detail...Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! Let our affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand." -Henry David Thoreau.

This is easier said than done during the midlife years — there's so many distractions and so little free time for reflection. That is why elders serve as important mentors to youngers, to help them "wake up" to enjoy life, despite its many pitfalls.

Moving from a childish, egocentric life and worldview to a more mature, inclusive mindset is a gradual process, sometimes taking many decades... if ever.

Philosopher, author and futurist Ken Wilbur in <u>A Brief History of Everything</u> estimates that the vast majority (about 60–70%) of the world today is stuck at either the egocentric stage (my story) or ethnocentric stage (tribal/our story) levels of consciousness.

Wilbur says that following "waking up" the next big step up is surrendering to the process of "growing up" — which takes time, inner work, and frankly a fair amount of letting to of the small false self in pursuit of the larger True Self. This requires some spiritual practices of connecting the head and heart.

In midlife hopefully we begin to move from "My Story" (egocentric) to "Our Story" (ethnocentric) to "The Story" (cosmocentric stage). We need all three stages, but ultimate fulfillment is only possible as we learn how to fit 'my/our' story into a larger 'the' story of unconconditional love for everyone and everything.

Every phase of life, from marriage to child rearing, to navigating our career, gives us opportunities to make the choice; to either try to change adverse circumstances, or to allow these circumstances to change us.

A willingness to let go of our preconceived notions of success, or rightness, is the sign of maturity, regardless of age. If elders do not show youngers how to let go of adverse situations... who will?

Sample Education Memoir: Independence and responsibility

As a teenager, I learned how to become increasingly independent as a so-called latchkey child. I soon discovered I could more or less do as I wished during the day as long as I got passing grades and did not do anything illegal, with the exception of smoking marijuana.

I remember after arriving home from my San Francisco runaway trip to the Haight-Ashbury, my parents decided a military summer school was the best option to correct my rebellious ways. So off I went to Army Navy Academy in Carlsbad, California.

Although much less strict than during the regular school year, I still faced a very scheduled lifestyle with set times for meals, recreation and bedtime. It was a new experience which I grudgingly adapted to. The goal was to teach me to live within school boundaries and become more responsible.

Although it did not feel especially like a form of heavy punishment, it definitely clipped my wings by requiring that I stay within the school walls for a full month. I remember learning how to play pool and surf as being the most fun activities at the Academy which was located on the beach.

I made a few friends who, like myself, were in the school as a form of discipline for misbehaving at home. I don't think the Academy experience changed me much, except that I learned how to follow the rules and then figured out a way to break them.

Upon arriving back home my parents decided a private school might be more challenging academically, so I was enrolled in The Buckley School in Sherman Oaks for ninth grade. This was another new experience which called for wearing navy slacks, tie, blazer, wing tip shoes and a much tougher curriculum than public school.

I gravitated to other students with long hair and hippie tendencies and did not feel like I fit in very well with this mostly pre-Ivy League crowd.

One day at lunch, I went off-campus to smoke some pot and upon my return being promptly sent to the vice-principal's office and then immediately expelled from the school.

This was a major disappointment to Mom and Dad, who were once again near their wits end with how to control my behavior. It was at this point that I convinced them we would all be better off if we took a break from each other indefinitely.

I proposed moving in with a friend and having his mother become my Foster parent. Mom and Dad agreed and this arrangement which worked for almost a year. But, due to some infraction of the Foster Mom's strict rules, I ended up needing to move out into another Foster home.

This was a much more difficult environment without having a friend in-house and also being thrust into a new high school. Still, my stubborn pride preferred this arrangement rather than agreeing to live within my step-Dad's rigid rules.

This situation continued until one day I decided to take my Foster parents car out for a short joyride in the neighborhood. Upon my return a few hours later, I was reprimanded strongly and given a ticket by the police.

Soon thereafter I decided that my stay at this less than amiable Foster home was over, which led to the next chapter of my life that would take me from Southern Cal to Phoenix, AZ.

Sample 2 - Education Memoir: Educational Advice

As an elementary school student I was eager to learn, but I often talked out of turn, therefore my best advice is: "talk less and listen more." This is a genuinely good rule in all of life.

A book a recently read entitled <u>Just Listen</u> explains how we can get much more agreement with others by first listening very closely to them, then asking a few additional prompting questions and listening. Often even those who diametrically disagree with our view on a subject will become more open to reconsideration if we make an earnest effort to really listen and understand their position.

Next, I think you must "read to lead." In a world now dominated by an audio/video entertainment-driven culture, we need to set aside quiet time to read, study, reflect and to make new personal discoveries in textbooks and recreational reading.

I have found that writing a book review after finishing a good book, particularly nonfiction books, helps me to digest the contents and then to periodically refer back to as a refresher. Regardless of your field of work or endeavor, reading keeps us on the cutting edge of our rapidly changing world and technology. I'm a lifelong learner by choice and necessity.

Another key is to maintain a so-called "beginners mind," which simply means remaining open to return to square-one as needed to relearn something we may think we already understand. The goal being to gain further understanding from a new perspective.

A beginner's mind requires humility, a willingness to admit being wrong and to jettison our immature ideas if needed, which we otherwise might be prone to hang onto for a lifetime.

This could range from a hypothesis in science, our worldview or philosophy of economics and politics. Our understanding often grows over time. If we keep all of our options open we may discover new truth.

As for public vs. private or home school for the early years, I've become a fan of the Montessori method of teaching children how to be creative, yet orderly, self-motivated yet community-oriented.

Once a Montessori preschool student masters a skill, whether tying their shoes or building a block house, they are encouraged to find a younger child and teach them this new skill, which reinforces the joy of learning and teaching from a young age.

Parents who have the time, skill and patience for home schooling are able to choose the curriculum and the worldview they want reinforced.

As for post high school education and college, my advice is to closely examine all of the available options. Some adolescence are motivated toward a specific career path, others are unsure and

might well consider a break from school to work or explore a vocational school.

I think the notion of every high school student jumping directly into four years of college, unless an academic scholarship is available, is not always the best path, especially given the high cost of educational debt.

A two-year, junior college seems like a wise and frugal way to start, which allows time for pondering the best career path. Sometimes finding a low paying apprenticeship job could be the best way to determine if you're really skilled or serious about entering a particular career path.

Week 4 – Marriage, Family, Career Memories

Writing memoirs that focus on marriage, family, and career can be a rewarding and insightful experience. Here are some steps to help you get started:

Take some time to reflect on your life experiences related to marriage, family, and career. Consider the key moments, challenges, and achievements that have shaped your journey. Create a rough outline or list of topics you want to cover in your memoir.

Determine the central theme or message you want to convey in your memoir. Is it a story of love and commitment? Or a tale of balancing family and career? Identifying your theme will give your memoir direction and coherence.

Authenticity is crucial in memoir writing. Be honest about your experiences, emotions, and perspectives. Readers connect with genuine stories, so don't shy away from sharing both triumphs and struggles.

Bring your memoir to life by using vivid descriptions and emotional depth. Engage the readers' senses and emotions, making them feel like they are experiencing the events alongside you.

Dialogue can make your memoir more dynamic and engaging. Use conversations with family members, spouses, or colleagues to add authenticity to your storytelling.

You can organize it chronologically, following a timeline of events, or opt for a thematic approach, where you group related stories and reflections together.

While it's essential to be open and candid in your writing, be mindful of the privacy of family members and friends. Avoid sharing intimate details that could make others uncomfortable without their consent.

hare the insights and lessons you've gained throughout your journey. How did your experiences in marriage and family life impact your career decisions? What advice would you offer to others facing similar challenges?

Memoirs often revolve around personal growth and transformation. Show how you evolved as an individual through your experiences in marriage, family life, and career.

Writing about personal experiences can make you feel vulnerable, but it is that vulnerability that often connects with readers on a deep level. Embrace it as part of the writing process.

Remember, writing a memoir is a journey in itself. Enjoy the process, be patient with yourself, and let your unique story shine through.

Midlife: Order → **Disorder** → **Reorder**

What's the happiest time of life? Early 20s and early 70s, say psychology researchers and polls.

Our 20s because our whole adult life is still ahead of us, full of limitless hopes, dreams, and opportunities... Our 70s because we have let go of our early dreams and embraced the realities of life and yet we're content.

But mid-life can be pretty turbulent— our 30s, 40s and 50s present some very real challenges.

"The greatest and most important problems of life are unsolvable. We must outgrow them." — Carl Jung.

You might even say that we learn more by doing things wrong... than by doing them right! Aging is a privilege. With age comes wisdom, and reflecting on past experiences can serve not only as our cherished memories, but also as grounds to impart our hardwon knowledge to younger generations.

"What is great in the morning is of little importance in the evening." -Carl Jung. What Jung observed is that our life is roughly divided into two halves. The first half task: creating a

proper container, our identity and survival. Second half task: finding what the container is really meant to hold and deliver.

The usual crossover point between first and second half of life is some type of loss, suffering or unforeseen crisis. A loss of job, marriage, family member, health, etc. This falling point becomes either a point of further growth, or further decline, depending upon our perspective.

As we age, Rohr says we see this life pattern; *order* -> *disorder* -> *reorder*... life, death, resurrection... is not the exception but rather the norm. "*First comes the fall, then the recovery. Both are the mercy of God*." -Lady Julian of Norwich. This is a key life principle elders are able to share with youngers!

The great problem with modern American culture is that the vast majority of youngers (and far too many elders) are stuck in the first half of life for their *entire life!*

Richard Rohr's bestselling book, <u>Falling Upward: A Spirituality</u> for the Two Halves of Life explains, "In my opinion the first half of life task is no more than finding the starting gate...the warmup act, not the full journey."

"The usual crossover points are a kind of 'necessary suffering' and 'homesickness'. Our unique little bit of heaven is installed by the Manufacturer within the product at the beginning! We are given a span of years to discover it, to choose it, and to live our own destiny to the fullest, to discover our True self."

In his book, "<u>The Art of Letting Go</u>," Rohr describes "Nine Stages of Maturity" in simple, non-technical terms. He stresses that the more advanced (or evolved) levels of consciousness should always *include all of the previous levels*, rather than

excluding them, which usually requires deep compassion and patience. To model this inclusiveness to youngers is an important role of a true elder.

Rohr emphasizes that ongoing growth requires some type of a loss at each new successive stage of consciousness, which serves to prod us onward. This "art of letting go" helps us move to further stages. He stresses that the more advanced (or evolved) levels of spiritual consciousness must always *include all of the previous levels*, rather than excluding them, which require deep compassion and patience.

Rohr emphasizes that progressive spiritual growth usually requires some type of a loss at each new successive stage of consciousness, which usually serves to prod us onward. This "art of letting go" helps us move to further stages.

Our journey toward enlightenment and learning the art of gracefully letting go means we embrace "*Falling Upward*" — the title of his bestselling book on growing up spiritually in the second half of life.

9 Stages of Consciousness Growth

Below is my humble, short summary of Rohr's 'Nine Stages of Spiritual/Consciousness Growth' and moving toward a more mature perspective on life and love.

- **1."My body is who I am"** This is our starting point as a child... it is the level of sex and survival... the priority is pleasure and security. It is a necessary stage, but sadly some people get stuck at this stage for a lifetime.
- **2.** "My external behavior is who I am" Our identity is focused on rituals, and badges which are important at this stage.

The goal is to look good to others. We become practiced at hiding and denying our shadow self. An example would be the extreme far-right wing, which live mostly in dualistic, (tribal) thinking and a 'win-lose' worldview. Protecting boundaries and identities is important. It is the eventual disappointment which leads to further progress.

- 3. "My thoughts and my feelings are who I am" Those at this stage may be learned, but they are still very egocentric, viewing education as a substitute for transformation, and strong individualism makes it hard to work together. An example would be 'limousine liberals', who embrace symbolism without substance. Rohr believes this stage is where the U.S. and most of Europe is presently at and will require a major personal loss of some kind to move forward.
- **4. "My deeper intuition, felt knowledge in my body is who I am"** At this stage we begin to think 'contemplatively', slowly gaining the ability to embrace paradox, making a discovery of 'soul' within us and within everything else. This is a very alluring stage, but it is also tempting to stay at this stage and become self-absorbed. Stage four is an important breakthrough, but it still lacks an outflow of love for the Creator and the other.
- **5. "My shadow self is who I am"** This stage begins our personal 'dark night of the soul', we start discerning our *True Self* and reality. We find a cause worth dying for, a growing care for others, love for God and our neighbor. We practice "shadow boxing" and "walking our talk." This stage can last a long time as we begin to embrace unconditional love and grow more accustomed to living with contradiction. It is often inside the darkness that we find the true light.

- **6. "My plan is useless, I am empty and powerless to save myself"** At this stage we finally give up on our own plans we instead ask, wait and trust our loving Creator for a spiritual breakthrough. We face the reality that when we can't change our circumstances, and instead must allow God to use our circumstances to change us. We learn how to sit in quiet meditation and draw upon a new Source. We move from religion to spirituality. In *Alcoholics Anonymous* (AA) this is considered the first stage of true transformation. It is an 'identity transplant' toward 'unitive thinking' and true spirituality.
- **7. "I am so much more than I thought I was"** At this stage the false self has significantly died and our True self begins taking over more continuously. We learn the freedom and joy of living in the present moment, of engaging in pure action, and that Another is holding me, so I don't need to hold myself.
- **8. "I am at home being led by grace"** This stage is not a 24/7 state, it comes and goes. It is a growing recognition of unity with God/Universe; "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). We begin living in communion with our Creator. An inner knowing develops. You find your soul and understand you are much more than your body. Mystical experiences and a unitive (vs. dualistic) worldview grows.

9. "I am who I am, I have let go of all attachment to myself"

— This is the final stage of surrender. I am willing to become, like St. Francis and all the great spiritual mystics in history, living without any pretense. I can be who I really am. I am fully present. I can now see God in everyone and everything. There is no need to impress anyone, I delight in being transparent and practicing non-dual thinking and living. My focus is on serving and loving others. I am becoming child-like. I can love my enemies.

Take some time to reflect on where you think you are on these stages of maturity and how downfalls in your life may have been stepping stones to new levels of understanding, wisdom and love.

Sample - Marriage, Family Memoir: Child rearing do-over

Reflecting on my early years as a father leaves me wishing I had invested more time with each of my older daughters, Jenni, Beth and Grace individually, which I was able to do three decades later with my youngest daughter Braida.

The first decade was a very challenging time for my wife Barbara and I. For me to discover who I was in my early 20s, while supporting a family and pursuing ministry at the same time was a major juggling act.

While in the midst of it, my time was so splintered that I was not as attentive as I could have been to my girls need for quality time. Having all three girls in the first four years meant having less available free time for each.

So I if a do-over was possible, I would have spread out having children over 6-8 years, instead of 4 years which would've given me more time with each child before the next one arrived.

Another change I would've made is committing to less outside ministry duties and more family time. I remember working all day then dashing out at night to help out at the Crossroads Coffeehouse, coordinating an upcoming concert or doing a weekly Sunday night radio program.

All of my busyness at the time seemed more important than doing things with my girls. Of course none of us are permitted a do

over in real life, so at best I can try to invest as much time as possible with my grandchildren and great grandchildren now.

I can also encourage them that good relationships are more important than achieving more and more things. Time is more valuable than money when it comes to raising children. It's a shame that by the time I learned this lesson so much water had passed under the bridge.

Sample 2: Family/Career Memoir - Family values

It is difficult to think of two words which have undergone a more radical re-definition in the last two generations than "family values."

We all inherit some type of values system from our parents or grandparents, which we either continue believing in, question, or reject. Our views sometimes evolve as we mature. In my case, my parents divorced at age 3, so most of my family value memories are with my Mom and step-Dad.

Because my parents worked full-time my brother Kevin and I had daycare a lot until we entered school. I have strong memories of being loved by Mom, but no fond memories of other loving caregivers. Mostly just memories of being disciplined for wrongdoing by my step-Dad.

I knew Mom and Dad loved each other, but it seemed like Keith just put up with Kevin and I. I always felt like a nuisance, in his way, so my self-value took a beating from Dad, but thankfully was nurtured by Mom.

Keith was a Korean War Vet turned police officer, which accounts for his tough persona in many ways. The situation only got worse when I hit my rebellious teen years..

I finally beginning to see life from Keith's perspective in 1973 after I attended a three-day seminar on Basic Life Principles by Bill Gothard Institute. I understood that he was the "bad cop" in my life, just doing his best to help me.

Once I confronted my own bitterness over the past, I called him to ask for forgiveness. This was a major turning point in our relationship. I was trying to demonstrate that a major transformation was taking root in my life.

Although Kieth and I never became best friends, we were at least cordial and respectful of each other in a new way. Meanwhile, my understanding of Christian family values was evolving and growing as I studied the Bible and had three daughters of my own.

As a new father I attempted to be patient, affirming and loving as best I could. You could say I decided to become a "good cop" which I now understood very often would put my wife Barbara in the role of "bad cop".

I now see more clearly why children need both parents to at times function as both good and bad cops to keep the family in balance.

Psychologists say children appreciate the good cop parent when they're young and gradually come to appreciate the bad cop parent later in life. This resonates as true. Too bad that by the time it all starts to make sense we're already grandparents.

I made a lot of mistakes in demonstrating Christian family values over the years, but thankfully I believe the qualities I tried to

personify: patience, kindness, affirmation and love have been planted in all four of my daughters and helped them to establish their family values to pass on.

As a grandfather and now great-grandfather, I have a new role, to reflect the character of God to my family with more clarity and wisdom.

Class 5: From Retirement to Reinspirement

Webster defines "retire" as: "1: to withdraw from action or danger, 2: to retreat for privacy, 3: to move backward, 4: to withdraw from occupation, conclude working or career." All four of these "withdrawals" mark the end of a season of life. But "where should we go from here?" is the question.

Today another 10,000 Baby Boomers will turn age sixty-five. That's over 3 million Boomers a year entering a "new stage" of life — for the next decade! And today 7,500 Greatest Generation seniors will pass away into eternity. Sadly, many will never understand their true life purpose nor record it for posterity.

Millennials, as well as generations X, Y and Z need our help to become all they can be! Let's shift into gear, use our many gifts and help them move from surviving to THRIVING! Lets demonstrate to every generation how to become a NEW Greatest Generation!

Statisticians report U.S. life expectancy in the 21st century will be ninety years or more. Ready or not, one-third of the population will enter this new season of life — scarcely imagined 50 or 100

years ago — without a rite of passage or road map. Your autobiography can help serve as a road map.

In his book *The Big Shift* author and founder of <u>Cogenerate.org</u> Marc Freedman, makes an impassioned call for boomers and seniors to accept the decades opening up between midlife and old age for what they really are — an entirely new stage of life, which he dubs the "encore" years.

"We're envisioning this chapter," writes Freedman, "as a time when we make some of our most important contributions, for ourselves, for our world, for the well-being of future generations."

Remembering Your Golden Years

Writing retirement memoirs can be a meaningful, enjoyable and enlightening endeavor. It allows you to reflect on your life, capture your experiences, and share wisdom gained over the years. Here are some steps and tips to help you get started with your retirement memoir:

Determine the main theme or focus of your memoir. It could be about your career journey, personal growth, family life, or a combination of various aspects of your life.

Honesty is crucial in memoir writing. Reflect on both the triumphs and challenges you faced during your life and career. Readers appreciate authenticity.

Bring your memories to life by using vivid and descriptive language. Paint a picture with words, so readers can immerse themselves in your experiences.

Personal anecdotes and stories make your memoir engaging and relatable. Share specific moments that impacted you or taught you valuable lessons.

Share your feelings and emotions throughout your memoir. Let readers understand the highs and lows you experienced during your retirement journey.

Injecting humor and wit into your writing can make your memoir enjoyable and add a light-hearted touch to serious moments.

Think about who your target audience is. Are you writing for family and friends, or are you planning to publish your memoir for a broader readership? Tailor your tone and content accordingly.

While your memoir is about your experiences, providing historical context can make it richer and help readers understand the broader societal backdrop of your life.

Share the wisdom you gained throughout your life and career. Offering insights and lessons learned can make your memoir not just a recollection of the past but also a source of inspiration for others.

Share your memoir with trusted friends, family, or writing groups to get feedback and suggestions. Constructive criticism can help you improve your writing.

If you have photographs, letters, or other memorabilia relevant to your memoir, consider including them as visuals to enhance the storytelling. Celebrate Your Journey: Writing your retirement memoir is a celebration of your life and achievements. Enjoy the process and take pride in preserving your legacy for future generations.

Remember, writing your retirement memoirs is a personal journey. It's a chance to leave a lasting legacy and share your unique experiences with the world. Embrace the process, and don't be afraid to let your voice shine through your writing.

How to Live Forever

TODAY there's a transformational movement beginning to gain traction worldwide among baby boomers to reimagine their second half of life.

"How To Live Forever," by Marc Freedman offers readers a preview into this brave new inter-generational future where the gifts and talents of an aging population fit hand-in-glove to meet the needs of a younger generation seeking the encouragement of true mentors.

Author and founder of Encore.org Marc Freedman presents an impassioned call to readers to accept the longevity decades now opening up between midlife and old age as an entirely new stage of life, which he dubs the "encore" years.

Marc's last bestseller, <u>THE BIG SHIFT</u> (2012) Freedman leads readers on an exciting guided tour of the growth of 'Third Stage of Life' thinking over the last century — marking the end of the retirement era popularized over the last 90 years — a second chance at fulfillment and contribution.

In his latest inspired sequel Freedman asserts something rather obvious yet often overlooked; the young and the old are built for each other. "The old are driven by a deep desire to be needed by and to nurture the next generation; the young have a need to be nurtured," writes Freedman.

Marc has followed his passion to engage older people's untapped talents to help alleviate young people's unmet needs over the last three decades, with ambitious projects including; Encore.org, Civic Ventures, Experience Corps and now Gen2Gen.org.

Freedman feels strongly that modern American culture has been age-segregated for far too long, which has stunted a deeply rooted instinct to connect the generational chain. Marc encourages boomers to "resist the mandate to go off in pursuit of their own second childhood. Instead of trying to be young, we should focus on being there for those who actually are [young]."

The Grace in Aging: Awaken as You Grow Older

The Grace in Aging is a classic book by Kathleen Dowling Singh which challenges readers to embrace the aging process physically, emotionally and spiritually, rather than seeking to forever preserve their fleeting youth and midlife.

By embracing the ripening process we find the joy and peace of being content and present to what life brings each day. Rather than striving to achieve or maintain an illusory V.I.P. status, readers are encouraged to stop and ask: "What is really important to achieve during the rest of my life?"

Now is the time to abandon the lifelong pursuit of ego-building upward mobility and instead begin to embrace ego-dismantling downward mobility, that is, to learn the grace of becoming nobody special.

As over 80 million Americans face this new world of being over sixty, Kathleen encourages us to focus on awakening to the magnificent opportunity this season of life offers to practice the presence of God in preparation for the challenges ahead of growing old and dying.

Speaking of dying, several years ago while my beloved mother was in the final stages of dementia, I read and reviewed Kathleen's other classic book, *The Grace in Dying: A Message of Hope, Comfort and Spiritual Transformation*.

This extraordinary book reveals Kathleen's deep understanding of the nearing death experience as only a seasoned, spirituallydriven hospice nurse present for hundreds of life-death transitions could.

Readers are introduced to the largely unknown steps of the nearing death experience in which the ego-self is systematically dismantled on our deathbed — what she refers to as "enlightenment at gunpoint."

From her perspective, "aging gracefully" is no accident. It requires taking intentional steps, just as becoming a true elder requires more than just getting old.

Retirement Memoir: *I want to be remembered for...*

I would like to be remembered for being more of a giver than a taker in life as a reflection of God's giving nature.

The older and wiser we become, the more we understand that when our time on earth we take nothing with us except our spiritual consciousness. What is most important to leave behind are good memories of loving relationships and shared activities, rather than stuff.

This reality has prompted me to work on becoming a stuff minimalist and a relationship maximalist over the last decade. For example, when I moved to Florida from Arizona in the summer of 2021, I decided to empty my storage unit and give away my furniture, bike, kayak and other stuff to my daughters and grandchildren.

I took only what I could fit in the back of my car on this new adventure: two guitars, a small amp, my clothes, a few pictures and memorabilia.

It was a very liberating and reminded me of the freedom I felt as a teenager hitchhiking up the California coast with only a backpack, guitar and a few changes of clothes. Somehow it seems that detachment from things promotes a greater trust and union with God.

I also hope to be remembered as a patient soul, willing to wait upon the Spirit before speaking or acting impulsively. For much of my life I was pretty self-centered, but gradually over the years, by the grace of God, I've learned to shed my ego layer by layer.

To me, earning patience means being able to say "It's all good, even when it's not!" Being able to hold a paradox of unresolved issues and still maintain my peace of mind and heart.

Lastly, I hope to be remembered as a loving father and grandfather, willing to invest time and money into the lives of my amazing family. In my younger days, at times I failed them and

caused some painful memories, which I am hopeful have faded over the decades and been replaced with better memories that will last a lifetime.

In my professional and ministry life I hope to be remembered as a connector, communicator and distiller of truth. Although truth is unchanging, our understanding of it can evolve over time. This has been the case with me. The older I get the less sure I am that I fully understand the great mysteries of life and God, yet the more sure I am that this is how it should be.

Sitting in silence can be the greatest teacher of who I am, rather than an ever-growing abundance of information. The fruit of knowing the truth is being set free from the cares of this life, regrets about the past, and fears about the future.

Sample 2 - Retirement Memoir: How am I unique?

Each and every one of us is a very unique human being. No two life experiences are exactly the same. This fact should prompt us to practice extreme compassion toward our fellow man. Yet our human nature still nudges us toward judging and comparing ourselves with everyone else.

What makes me unique is the sum total of my upbringing, gifts or talents of intelligence, curiosity, creativity, actions and life choices as well as my deepest held convictions.

I am unique in having chosen a spiritual path at a young age. At 20, I chose to follow my heart and soul. I tried to answer my calling to seek first the truth, rather than seeking first educational degrees or maximum monetary compensation. Between the ages of 21-30 I viewed my work as a means to the end of ministry, but eventually the financial pressures of life, marriage and family motivated me to more seriously apply myself to a career in sales and marketing for the next 40+ years.

Thankfully, working for a spiritually-driven investment firm allowed me a rather unique opportunity of blending work and ministry. A lasting legacy of SwissAmerica.com is helping explain that "true" wealth is both physical and spiritual.

In 2023, our company prayer/Bible study group celebrates its 30th year. The group started as a twice a week 8am meeting led by the founder and Chairman Craig. R. Smith. The group now continues online due to the major changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020.

Since moving into semi retirement in 2022, I have chosen new ways to serve and volunteer, such as leading a senior class in writing. Another somewhat unique gift I have developed is condensing inspirational books into song lyrics and then putting them to music to share truths I've learned.

In some ways we're all very ordinary people with much in common. We are living ordinary lives which eventually lead us to an ordinary death. We are also extraordinary people, special and unique.

Conclusion - Once Your Autobiography Draft is Written:

Next begins the somewhat tedious process of editing, which is best done with the help of another writer or experienced editor. You need to be willing to "take a machete" to your first draft and streamline it to make your points as efficiently and powerfully as possible.

I am available to help you with this process. Simply email me with the particulars of what you would like to end up with and a pdf or Word document draft if possible. Then email me at: ideaman@myideafactory.net for a free time/cost estimate.

When you and your editor are happy with your text, you can either read it aloud into your smart phone to create a digital text document, or type it into a Word document. I recommend the document is sized at 5.5" x 8" or 6" x 9" for a standard paperback book output. Or, if you prefer 8.5"x11" format with a spiral binding, which can easily be done at any print shop or online printer.

If possible, I recommend adding a variety of relevant photographs to the text of your memoirs. You can digitally insert your photos into your Word document for added impact and readability.

Once you are happy with the finished product and are sure that it is free of typos and spell-checked, then you can decide on how many copies you want to print and whether you are content with black and white or want it printed in full color.

If you would like a "perfect bound" book/booklet with a glued spine that looks like a standard paperback/hardback book I used Smartprint.com and was happy with the reasonable cost and fast turnaround time (7 days).

Depending upon your document's dimensions, quantity, number of pages and if you decide on B&W or color, the cost per book will vary. For example, 20 copies of a 6"x9" 148 page book, printed in full color will cost about \$18/each. As the quantity goes up, price goes down.

Lastly, I wish all of you great success in completing your autobiography and pray that this class has served as a springboard to get that book inside you out! AND PLEASE... KEEP WRITING!

The Grace in Living By Kathleen Dowling Singh

Kathleen Dowling Singh has done the universe a great favor to explain the value of writing your own personal spiritual awakening biography which describes the movement into "being" beyond the self – which somewhat differs from an autobiography.

Two important questions need to be asked at each of the four stages, or quarters of spiritual development: 1) - What is prompting you to turn toward awakening, being and liberation? 2) What inclines you to fall back into the limitation's of self and survival mode? Kathleen describes our spiritual development or evolution as being divided into four quarters on a chronological timeline. We might begin at any stage of life, old age or nearing death. Each stage may be of different duration for every person, with the second stage often taking the most time and work.

1) The first quarter moves from Tasting spiritual awakening... to Hungering for spiritual growth.

- * <u>Waking Up</u>. The first-quarter often begins with short glimpses beyond our small self.
- * Reaching for the beyond often arises when we cry out for help. The first quarter ends when the longing becomes too strong to remain silent any longer. Spiritual desire becomes a priority in our life.
- * The first quarter is spent developing healthy identity, ego and self and learning to survive. However, we later discover our ego mistakenly sees itself as separate from others and from the sacred.

- * It is this very sense of incompletion that is at the heart of our yearning for the soul to be heard.
- * We seek ways to let go of our known way of being, allowing grace to move us to higher ground.
- * The path leading to this first quarter of spirituality may begin as a child being awestruck by nature, being affected in mind, body and/or soul. It may be a sense of connection when we take moments to pause during normal events, glimpses of unbounded love also give us a heightened compassion toward others and our self.
- * This moving from tasting to hungering could be initiated by music, which some referred to as the original language of the heart/soul.
- * It could be a result of sickness, or a feeling of being both tiny and vast. It is an inner compulsion to seek truth.
- * It may be a childhood memory of playing in the ocean, feeling like at some point you might be just a drop of water dissolved into the ocean.
- * It may come while reading a book, or hearing somebody speak and your soul asks: "What is real?...I know there's something more than what I see right now."

2) In the second quarter, we move from Seeking spiritual growth... to the End of seeking.

- * **Growing Up**. The second quarter begins when we actually seek a path out of self and of suffering.
- * There's a longing to escape the purposelessness and alienation that we've come to experience in life. * It may begin with teachers, book or groups that resonate with our longing to discern the truth.
- * Exploring our spiritual biography, we discern that ("central casting"/ God / the Universe) has sent us many teachers along the way in the form of mentors, friends, difficult people, serious sorrow or depressions. We become seekers, yet we still deeply believe in our self and ego.
- * The second quarter could span months, years or decades in our life and can be painful, but healing is essential to growth in the second quarter. At some point we feel insufficient in the self's survival mode.

- * The second quarter is marked by expanded attention beyond mere survival and requires letting go of anything the self thinks it can achieve on it's own spiritually.
- * Liberation follows intention aligned with grace. Surrender is a tumble into undefendedness.
- * The second quarter ends when we see through the illusion of seeking the fantasy of forever seeking/searching. It begins intermittently, then grows steadily.
- * Surrendering is frightening to the ego self because the self has no footing beyond it-self.
- * In "being" the attraction to self dissolves, we begin to trust the grace working within us. We begin to trust our inner direction and realize that we are as the book of John says "grafted into the vine".
- * The outcome of emerging from the second quarter is that we begin to genuinely care for one another.

3) In the third quarter, we move from spiritual Healing... into spiritual Maturity.

- * <u>Cleaning Up.</u> The third quarter is marked by a growing detachment from ego growth. Individuality is grasped, but not elevated above other expressions of the sacred.
- * The ego's operating system of survival mode remains available to function in daily life, but we trust it only to help us navigate the world and our interactions. We begin to operate, be driven by divine love.
- * Self is no longer seen as our soul, or even our primary operating system, nor as a reliable refuge.
- * In "being" mode, we come to know the awakened state of Grace and how to put Grace into action.
- * We learn to "allow," which becomes a familiar response. We're all going to face some suffering as we age, but our response allows us to graciously embrace it.
- * We have a clear-eyed discernment about what serves us and what no longer serves us. Decisions are made with increasing wisdom. As both the self and the seeker diminishes presence arises.

4) In the fourth quarter we move into Ripening, Enlightenment, Servanthood.

- * Showing Up. In the ripening stage, we literally become nobody special. We begin to experience greater dimensions of love, compassion, joy and liberation. We deeply appreciate our commonality and our individuality comes out to play. * Trust permeates us, the call of the self is heard mindfully, but is much less seductive.
- * As we ripen we come to fruition. We become illuminated and inclusive, not separated. We begin to see the unity of matter/spirit of self/other, we know our self as embodied Grace.

Kathleen has created a wonderful list of approximately 60 prompting questions to help us begin to write our spiritual biography and to complete a spiritual timeline.

"Wake up, grow up, clean up, show up"

by Ken Wilbur

In this time of spiritual growth and awakening, it is helpful to have a framework that can orient our practice and our progress. For this purpose, a few years ago, Ken Wilbur introduced a frame into the Integral lexicon called "wake up, grow up, clean up, show up". This simple frame has gone viral and many (both teachers and students alike) have benefited from its use.

WAKE UP

Whether conscious of it or not, all members of humanity have the heart-desire to return Home; to return to the glorious abode of Ultimate Reality. All human beings have an intrinsic desire to know the single, indivisible, Great Sphere of Love from which, into which, and as which all of existence shines forth. All human beings have the desire and opportunity to "wake up". Within the context of Integral Theory, "waking up" relates to various state-stages of consciousness. As one awakens, one's exclusive identification with superficial layers of reality

are dismantled. One moves beyond an exclusive identification with thought - to the non-dual base of awareness; a base that naturally and spontaneously manifests as all relative form. Waking up to this base awareness is fundamental to the New Civilization now emerging on Earth. Waking up to this single sphere, always already perfect exactly as it is, must be our most prominent priority.

GROW UP

Waking up to the true nature of Reality is only part of our duty. The single abode of Awakened Awareness, intrinsically good by its very nature, shines forth and refracts through manifold aspects of Itself. This refraction of perfect light forms seemingly individual constellations of consciousness. We commonly call these relative vortices of consciousness "selves". We give them names, social status, and roles. In Integral circles, we even say that each self has Four Quadrants, with various degrees of developmental capacity and a whole matrix of qualities. Each unique expression deserves our recognition. Each unique expression deserves dignity and respect. Everything you are, and everything you do, either enhances or dampens the potential of Reality to express itself through you, as you, for the benefit of the whole. The more we "grow up" through varying structures of consciousness the more perspectives we can take, the more complexity we can hold, and the more care we can release in the world. A commitment to "growing up", in all dimensions of life, becomes a sacred vow one takes to allow Reality to incarnate through us to the fullest degree possible.

CLEAN UP

In a similar way, the more integrated each of us is, the more whole and psychologically healthy we are, the less dusty the glass is in our stained glass window of life. The less dusty our window, the more brightly the Light of Reality can shine. This means we all have a responsibility to "clean up" anything that might be clouding our transmission. If the process of "growing up" helps to provide more tools in the toolkit of life, "cleaning up" gives us more refined skills and more potent energy

for how we actually use those tools. At a certain point in practice, we no longer do psychological work for our own benefit. Rather, because we know that Reality can touch more people through us the cleaner we are, we clean up to be of deeper service. Cleaning up shadows and integrating all relative dimensions of self allows us to purify the signal from Source as it broadcasts out into the world.

SHOW UP

Finally, all of this, whether we speak of waking up, growing up, or cleaning up, is used in service of the whole. The entire frame is just a skillful way to catalyze your maximum potential to "show up" in all of your glory, as a true emanation of Source. As we move beyond individual paradigms of isolation and separation, humanity will more fully discover the power and potential of shared unified intention. Then with this understanding at heart and with each of us exemplifying a unique expression of intrinsic unity, "We" can, together, rain-down the blessings on the Earth that we have come here to give. May this be an invitation and activation of all that necessary for us to show up together as the single unified force of Reality that we truly are. Wake up. Grow up. Clean up. Show up. We explore each of these concepts in detail throughout the book *The Coming Waves*.

First quarter prompting questions...

- -What were your deepest moments of understanding or vastness?
- -What were your conceptions of yourself? -What are your ideas about the sacred?
- -What was the nature of your relationship with others? -What were the moments you felt wounded?
- -What conclusions did you come to about yourself and the world? What were your challenges?
- -What gave you strength? -What beneficial qualities did you develop?
- -What negative beliefs about yourself did you develop?
- -What did you learn from spiritual mentors or the teachers of goodness you might've had?

- -What rules for living did you come to hold? -Which of these did you keep, which discard?
- -What are the legacy's from your family?
- -What are the moments when you saw a shift in how you saw yourself and the sacred?
- -When did spiritual hunger begin to awaken in you?

Second-quarter questions...

- -What turned you towards spirit? -What turned you back toward a separate sense of self?
- -When did you first reach out to find a spiritual path? -What instigated the path of active searching?
- -What teachers or teachings resonated with you? -What shift occurred in you in response?
- -What were your thoughts about your goal? -What healing did you find necessary in order to continue your spiritual path? -How did you tend to the healing needed?
- -What shift has occurred in your sense of self since this healing has occurred?
- -What inner obstructions did you bring to the journey, whats the changing nature of your relationship with them?
- -What challenges were you facing in your life during this time?
- -What church challenges have faced you in your practices?
- -What was has changed in your emotional reactivity?
- -What were your practices during the second quarter and what was your experience of them?
- -What was changing ideas about your practices? -What was the nature of your efforts your striving?
- -What were your shifts in the understanding of the spiritual path?
- -What was your spiritual goal initially? How is that shifted?
- -Were there disappointments about goals and outcomes?
- -What did you learn from these disappointments? -How was your practice shifted over time?
- -What do you consider the benefits of the different practices that you engaged in?

- -What has been the shift in relationships with family and loved ones?
- -Were there moments of spiritual crisis? -What were your deepest moments of understanding?
- -What have been the shift in propensity to love and can passion?
- -What turning point allowed you to surrender? -What growing distractions and seductions have you noticed?
- -When did you begin to assume responsibility for your own spiritual path and begin to give authority do your own direct experience?
- -What has been the changing nature of your spiritual confidence?
- -What was the moment when you felt the most presence of spirit?
- -What is rearranged in you and on an energetic level?
- -At what point or points did you come to hold yourself accountable for your realizations and understanding them to be embodied?
- -What changing relationship with faith and confidence trust and grace?
- -What are your most grateful moments?

Third quarter questions...

- -What inclined you to move deeply into awakening?
- -What drew you back into the separate sense of self?
- -What healing was necessary?
- -How have you reduce the distance between your realizations and embodiment in every day life?
- -What has been the changing nature of your practice?
- -What shifts in your understanding of the spiritual path... of the awakening of self?

Fourth-quarter questions...

- -What inclined you to move deeply into being?
- -What can pull you back to reactivity of the separate self?
- -Have you had times that you felt this is it enlightenment?
- -What did you learn? What is your practice now?
- -What do you offer the world? What are you grateful for?

Kathleen suggests choosing the questions that resonate with you for reflection, meditation & response.

155 Prompting Questions

Please review this list and choose 10–15 questions from each of the four life categories to start creating your memoirs which will be combined chronologically to form your autobiography.



I. Early Childhood Memories

1. Do You Feel Your Name Fits You?

How did your parents come to name you? Is there a story attached to your name? Does it have a meaning? How do you feel about your name? Have you thought of changing your name?

2. What is Your First Memory?

Write about your earliest memory. What do you see? How old do you think you were? Was it an event or just a mental "snapshot?" Does it have any special meaning to you now?

3. Mother Memories?

Describe your mother. What did/does she look like? What were/are her personality traits and characteristics? How are you like or unlike her? Did she exhibit unconditional love?

4. Father Memories?

Describe your father. What did/does he look like? What were/are his personality traits and characteristics? How are you like or unlike him? Did he exhibit unconditional love?

5. Where Your Parents in Agreement on Discipline? When conflicts arose, did both parents agree on how you should be disciplined? Was one parent a "good cop" and the other a "bad

cop"? Whom were you closest to as a child, and then in later life?

6. Maternal Grandparents

Do you remember your mother's parents? Describe them, and your relationship to them. Do you did spend much time together?

7. Paternal Grandparents

Do you remember your father's parents? Describe them, and your relationship to them. Do you did spend much time together?

8. Grandparent Regrets

Do you wish you knew more about your grandparents or other ancestors that they never told you?

9. Favorite Childhood Home

Where was it? What did it look like? Describe the smells, sounds, and textures in the home. What was your room like? What was the best thing about it? The worst? Where you good at making new friends?

10. Childhood Friendships

Can you remember your best childhood friend? If so, write about that person. Have you stayed in touch over your lifetimes? If not, do you have any regrets about losing track of them?

11. Childhood Retreats/Hideouts

Did you have a hideout, fort or other special place as a child? Was it secret, or did you share it with siblings and friends? Write about it.

12. Proudest Childhood Moment

What was your proudest moment in your childhood? A special award or achievement?

13. Biggest Childhood Embarrassment /Regret?

What behavior (if any) are you most embarrassed about? Were there any consequences?

14. Your Childhood Neighborhood

What was your neighborhood growing up like, or neighborhood(s) if you moved? Was it social, or did you feel isolated from your neighbors? Did you have a neighborhood hangout?

15. Childhood Playmates

Did you have very many playmates? What did you do together? Were you the leader or follower?

16. Holiday Traditions

What holiday traditions did your family celebrate when you were growing up? Were there special foods or rituals involved? Have you continued those traditions in your adult life? Were holidays happy times or stressful times in your family?

17. Childhood Sports

What were your first athletic experiences? Community night games? Little League? Gym or ballet class? How did you feel

about sports in general? Were you good at athletics or was it hard for you?

18. Movie Memories

Do you remember the first movie you ever saw on the big screen? What were some of your other favorite movies growing up? Favorite actors/actresses? Why were they your favorites?

19. Siblings

Describe your sibling(s). Which one was most like you, which one was least like you? Which did you get along with the most/least? What have you learned from your siblings? Do you stay in touch?

20. Childhood Environments

Describe the sounds and scents of your childhood environment. Did you wake up to the smell of brewing coffee, or fall asleep to the muffled sounds of your parents' conversation or music in the next room? What about your school, your outside play areas, your friends' homes?

21. Your Family Pet(s)

Tell a story about a favorite (or least favorite) pet/animal in your young life. Did they sleep with you?

22. Family Vacations

Did your family go on any vacations? Where was you favorite place you remember visiting? Describe what that was like for you.

23. Childhood Relocation

Did your family move during your childhood or youth? How did you feel about the move(s) and how did moving affect you? 24. Childhood Trauma/Issues

Was there anything or anyone that really bothered you in your childhood or youth? How did you deal with it? Did you ever consider running away from home?

25. Musical Interests

Did you learn to play a musical instrument? If so, did you enjoy it? How good did you get, and do you still play it now? Did learning about music influence you in any other way?

26. Brushes With Death

In your youth or childhood, did you experience a death (of a loved one, or a favorite pet)? How did that experience affect you?

27. Religious Beliefs

Did you have any religious or spiritual beliefs in your childhood/youth? What experiences did you have that led you to those beliefs? Have your beliefs changed since then?

28. Most Memorable Day

Think about your elementary school days. What was the most memorable day, event or occasion? What happened? Was it a positive or negative memory?

29. Childhood Money

Did you receive a weekly allowance? Were you a saver, or spender? Describe something you bought with your own money. Did you earn extra money with a lemonade stand paper route or mowing lawns?

30. Childhood Reading

At what age did you first learn to read? What were some of your favorite books/stories? Did someone read to you at night? Who? Did your early reading habits carry into school and adulthood?

II. School/College Memories

31. When I Grow Up...

What did you want to be when you grew up? Did your ideas change from younger childhood to older childhood? Did your childhood dreams affect your adult choice of career?

32. Favorite Teacher

Who was your favorite teacher in school? Why was he/she your favorite? What is the most important lesson or subject that you learned?

33. Fashion

Did you have a favorite outfit or piece of clothing in your childhood or youth? Why was it your favorite? Did the clothing you wore when you were growing up have an influence on your life in some way?

34. Historical Events

What historical or political events do you remember most clearly during your childhood/youth years? (Pearl Harbor, assassination of President Kennedy, 9/11?) How did they affect you?

35. Favorite Foods

What were your favorite foods growing up? Who cooked for you, and how was it? Did your family grow any food?

36. School Dances

Did your school have dances or did you ever take dancing lessons? What was that experience like? Did it help or hurt your social life as a youth? Did you meet or take your first love at a dance?

37. Performing

What was the first time you recall speaking or performing in public? Were you terrified, or did someone have to pull you off the stage with a cane? How do you feel about it now?

38. Adolescence

Overall, how would you describe your adolescence? Was it a difficult time for you, or full of fun and adventure?

39. Most Embarrassing

What were you most embarrassed about as an adolescent? What do you think about that now?

40. Passions and Ideals

What were you most passionate about as a teenager? Did you have any strong religious, political or social justice ideals? Or were you obsessed with a celebrity, hobby, musical group or sports team? How did this passion influence your life?

41. Admiration

As an adolescent and young adult, who, out of your friends/family/acquaintances did you admire the most and why? Who did you admire in the public arena and why? How did these people influence your later life?

42. Independence and Responsibility

As an adolescent and young adult, how did you learn independence and responsibility? What lessons did you learn that you carried with you into your adult life?

43. Entertainment

In your teen years, what did you do for entertainment? Who did you do it with? Do you have any regrets about what you did?

44. Transportation

How did you get around when you were a teen? Did you borrow your parents' car or have your own? Take the bus? Ride a bike or horse? Describe a memorable incident.

45. School Subjects

What were your favorite school subjects in junior high/high school? What was your least favorite?

46. Cliques

Were there "cliques" in your school? Did you identify with any of them? How did the social hierarchy of school affect you?

47. Best School Friends

Who were your best friends in junior high/high school? Were they different than the friends you had in childhood? Did your friends help you or hinder you, and why? Do you still keep in touch?

48. Generation Gap

What was your relationship with your parents like when you were a teen?

49. Future Dreams

In your adolescent years, what were your hopes and dreams for your future? How do you feel about those ambitions now? Did you fulfill any of your dreams?

50. The Hardest Part

What was the hardest part about growing up, or the hardest thing you had to go through in your childhood/adolescent years? What did you learn from it? How did it shape your character? What would you warn the child you about?

51. The Best Part

What was the best part about your growing up years?

52. Dating Philosophy

What rules or philosophy did your parents and/or faith tradition have about dating? What advice or instruction did you get regarding romance and relationships? How did that affect you?

53. Leaving Home

When and under what circumstances (college, mission, marriage, military, job?) did you leave home for the first time? How did you feel about leaving home? How did your family feel about it?

54. Coming of Age

Was there a particular event that marked your becoming an adult? What was it, and how did you feel about it?

55. Secondary Education

What were your goals regarding secondary education? Did you achieve them? If so, how? If not, why not? Do you have any regrets about your education or lack thereof?

56. College Days

If you went to college or university, take this time to list a few memorable events of your time in college. If you didn't attend college, write about why you didn't go and how you felt about it.

57. College Teacher

Was there a college teacher or professor who had a particularly strong influence on your life? How and why?

58. Community Service

In your young adulthood, did you do some kind of substantial community service, such as a humanitarian trip, or religious or service mission? What did you learn from the experience?

59. Educational Advice

What advice or wisdom would you like to share to others about education? What did you learn from your educational experiences that was especially valuable?

III. Marriage/Family/Career Memories

60. Career

How did you get into your primary career or line of work? Was it planned or unexpected?

61. Best Job

What was the best job you've ever had and why? What was the worst job? What did you learn from each?

62. Career Changes

What career or job changes have you experienced? What were the reasons behind the change and how did it affect your life? Can you now see an evolutionary pattern?

63. Work Challenges

What have been the biggest challenges in your work life? How did you solve or overcome those challenges?

64. Career Redo

If you could go back and change any of your career choices, what would you change and why? If you could choose a different career in a theoretical "alternate universe," what would you be?

65. Economics

What economic fluctuations/challenges have you experienced in your life? How did they shape you?

66. Mentors

Did you have a mentor or mentors in your career or work life? What did you learn from them? Have you ever mentored someone?

67. Financial Advice

What advice would you give about finances (saving, investing, habits, etc.), based on your own experience and successes/failures? Did someone give you financial advice at some point? If so, how did it affect your life?

68. Discrimination

Have you experienced any discrimination in your career or workplace(s)? If so, how did it affect you and how did you deal with it?

69. Family Values

What beliefs or attitudes regarding marriage and family were expressed by your family of origin? What of those have you held on to—or let go of—and why? How have their ideas influenced your own marriage or family experience?

70. How We Met

Tell the story of how you met your spouse(s) or partner(s).

71. Failed Romances

Describe a romantic relationship you had that didn't last. What happened? What did you learn from it?

72. Initial Attraction

What was it about your spouse/partner that first drew you to him/her? Was your attraction immediate, or did it grow over time? How did your courtship with your spouse/ partner proceed and how did you get to know one another better?

73. Proposal/Engagement

Describe your marriage proposal. What was said? Where did it happen? How did you feel? How long was your engagement period? What did you learn about each other during this time? Was it blissful or stressful and why?

74. Wedding Day

Describe your wedding day. Did everything run smoothly, or was there a glitch or two? Was it big or small? Who was there? What did you wear? How did honeymoon go?

75. Marital Adjustments

What did you and your future spouse have the hardest time getting used to? What were your most challenging differences?

76. Spousal Qualities

What are/were the qualities of your spouse that you appreciate most?

77. Spousal Challenges

What are/were the qualities of your spouse that are/were the most difficult for you?

78. First Home Together

Describe the first place you lived together as a couple. What memories do you have of that place?

79. First Fight

What was the first fight or argument you recall having with your spouse/partner? How did you resolve it?

80. News of First Child

Describe how you felt when you found out you were going to have your first child. Was it planned?

81. First Child

Describe the day your first child was born. Did anything unusual happen? How did you feel?

82. Children Names

Record the names, birth dates, and birthplaces of each of your children. How did you come to pick each child's name?

83. Favorite Thing About Each Child What is your favorite thing about each of your children/grandchildren?

84. Biggest Challenge With Each Child

Describe the biggest challenge you have had with each of your children./grandchildren.

85. Family Traditions

What family traditions did you observe in your family of origin? What, if any, of those traditions did you continue with your own family? New traditions you began?

86. Child Rearing Philosophy

What are/were your beliefs or philosophies regarding raising your own children? How did it differ from the philosophy of your parents and the way you were raised?

87. Memorable Family Vacation

What was your most memorable family vacation or trip and why?

88. Proudest Parental Moment

What was your proudest moment as a parent?

89. Heartbreaking Parental Moment

What was your most heartbreaking or difficult moment as a parent?

90. Teaching Moment

Describe a "teaching moment" you experienced with one of your children.

91. Favorite Family Activities

What did your family like to do together? Describe some of your favorite family activities.

92. Child Rearing Do-Over

If you had it to do over, what would you do differently in raising your children?

93. Mini Me

In what ways are your children like you? In what ways are they like your spouse? In what ways are they unlike you or your spouse?

94. Career Story #1

Pick an event from your work/career life and write about why was this event memorable?

95. Career Story #2

Pick another event from your work/career life and write about why was this event memorable?

96. Career Story #3

Pick another event from your work/career life and write about why was this event memorable?

97. Career Regrets

Do you have any regrets about your career or work life? What would you have done differently and why?

98. Firing Line

Have you ever been fired from a job? Or have you ever had to fire someone? How did either experience affect you?

99. Bosses

In your career or work life, who was the best boss you ever had and why? Worst boss?

100. Awards

Have you received any awards or accolades from your work? What was the nature of them and how did they affect you?

IV. Retirement

101. Retirement Plans

What are your plans and dreams for your retirement? If you are already retired, how do you feel about being retired? How do you spend your time?

102. Bucket List

What is on your "bucket list" that you haven't accomplished? (In other words, what are some things you'd like to do before you die?)

103. Remembered For...

What would you like to be most remembered for?

104. Kindred Spirits

Who are the soul mates or kindred spirits in your life? What is the nature of your connection with them?

105. Violence

Have you ever been the victim of an act of violence? How did that affect you? Have you recovered, and if so, how?

106. Technology

What do you think have been the most significant inventions or technological advances in your lifetime? What of those has specifically affected your life the most and why?

107. Personality

What personality traits run in your family? What traits do you feel you've inherited?

108. Biases

What biases or prejudices have you held and where do you think they came from? Do you still feel the same way now?

109. Personality Changes

Has your personality changed in any way since you were young? In what way has it changed, and are you happy or unhappy about the change?

110. Ashamed

What are/were you most ashamed of in your lifetime?

111. Pet Peeves

What are your pet peeves—the things you find most annoying—and why?

112. Silliest Fads

What have been some of the silliest fads you have seen come and go in your lifetime?

113. Competition

Have you ever won a competition of some sort? How did you prepare and what circumstances led to your win? How did you feel afterwards?

114. Political Beliefs

How have your political beliefs evolved in your lifetime? Have you changed your mind on any major political or social issues, or have your politics remained consistent? Why?

115. Spiritual Evolution

How have your spiritual beliefs evolved over your lifetime? Why?

116. Spiritual Practices

What if any spiritual practices do you follow regularly, such as; religious services, walks in nature, daily meditation or silent contemplation?

117. Greatest Strengths

What do you feel are your greatest strengths and why? What do you think others would say are your greatest strengths? Are they the same or different?

118. Greatest Weaknesses

What do you feel are your greatest weaknesses? Have they changed or improved over time? How have they affected your life?

119. Addictions

Have you ever had a problem with substance abuse or addiction, or been close to someone who has? How has it affected your life? How did you overcome?

120. Travel Story #1

How has travel played a role in your life? Write about a memorable travel experience.

121. Travel Story #2

Write about another memorable travel experience.

122. Travel Story #3

Write about another memorable travel experience.

123. Greatest Person

Who do you think is a truly great person, and why? How has this person influenced your life, either directly or indirectly?

124. Conversation with a Famous Person

If you could have a conversation with a famous person or historical figure (alive or deceased), who would it be and what questions would you ask them?

125. Food

What are your attitudes about food? How did your family influence your eating habits, and have they changed over time? Do you have any fears or frustrations with the issue of food?

126. Funny Bone

Write about your sense of humor. Who in your family influenced you in that way? What kinds of things do you find funny? What is the funniest thing you've ever witnessed?

127. Community Service

Have you been involved with some kind of service to your community? How has that affected you and what have you learned from your experiences with your community?

128. Most Fun Memory

Write about a memorable fun time spent with a grandparent, aunt or uncle. What did you do? What was this person like?

129. They Made Me Who I Am

Make a list of people, events, successes, failures that helped shape who you are today. What did you learn from these influences?

130. Falling "Upward"

What are some experiences that at first seemed negative, but later turned out to be excellent teaching moments, which you now embrace as positives?

131. Musical Memories

Often music can transport us back in time to a particular place and time. Can you think of a favorite song which conjures up memories from the distant past?

132. Sweet Smelling Memories

Special scents can also transport us back in time. What are some of your favorite smells both in nature and in the kitchen? Can you remember the time you first enjoyed that fragrance?

133. On the Road

What are some of you favorite road trip memories? Do you plan to take more toad trips in retirement?

134. I'm Lost!

Write about a time you got lost. Where were you? Did someone locate you or did you find your own way? Did you learn any lesson from being lost?

135. The Sound of Silence

What are some of the types of silence you have experienced? Do you find comfort during times of silence? What do you think about in quiet times?

136. Can't Live Without...

What is a possession you have that you can't live without? What is the special significance? Is there a story behind this object?

137. First Impressions

What personality traits do you think people meeting you for the first time recognize? What do you do that conveys these traits? Describe a first impression of you? Is this an impression you want to make?

138. Advice

What is the best or worse piece of advice you've ever given someone? Who did you give it to? If you had it to do over again would you tell the person the same thing? Why or why not?

139. A Sight I'll Never Forget

Write about something you saw that you will never forget. Where there any people involved in this memorable scene? Why do you think this spectacle had such an impact on you? Where were you?

140. On the Wild Side

Write about an encounter with a wild animal? What was the animal? Where did you have this encounter?

141. Low Points

Make a list of the low points in your life. Don't back away from painful moments. Pick one of these moments and write about it in more detail.

142. Near Death Experience

Have you ever had a brush with death? If so, what were the circumstances and did the experience change your life in a significant way? If not, what is your perception of the after life?

143. Three Truthful Questions

If you were granted three truthful answers (rather than wishes) who would you question and what would you want to know?

144. Praise and Criticism

How good are you at receiving compliments? How about criticism? How important is what people think of you? Has your attitude and acceptance grown over the years?

145. Financial Preparation

Have you been a better saver or spender over your lifetime? Do you have any worries about being financially stable during your retirement years? What are you doing to solve any concerns?

146. Is There Not a Cause?

What are some of the social causes that you are most passionate about supporting either with volunteering or donations?

147. Physical Fitness

What are you doing in your later years to stay in good health? Regular exercises that you participate in?

148. Coping With Lost Spouse/Significant Other

In later life we often find ourselves a widow or widower. If this applies, how are you filling the relationship void after the loss of a soulmate? After a grieving period, would you consider seeking another mate? Why or why not?

149. Unique You

What are some of things that you have done in your lifetime that make you a unique person?

150. Standing in Awe

What in all creation are some of the things that awe you the most?

151. Hidden Surprises

What might surprise people if they really knew you? Are you becoming more transparent as you age?

152. I Want More...

What do you want more of in your life? What are you doing to reach your goal?

154. The True You

What do you long for others to understand better about you?

155. The Ideal Life: Describe an average day in an ideal life.

Tell Me The Story of Your Life

by David Bradshaw

Please tell me the story of your life,
To understand your joys and strife.
I want to know the real you,
I need to know what's really true.
Tell me about your childhood dreams,
What really makes your heart beam?

Chorus

Write, write, write it down!
So what's in your heart can be found.
Write, write, write it up!
So your thoughts may fill my cup.

Tell me the story of what you fear, I want us to face it now, my dear. I pray a healing spirit to flow, When together our hearts aglow. I long to know and be known, To never again feel all alone.

Chorus

Write, write, write it down!
So what's in your heart can be found.
Write, write, write it up!
So your thoughts may fill my cup.

Suggested Reading

I have found the following books helpful in discovering your True Self in the second half of life.

- 1. Falling Upward by Richard Rohr
- 2. Everything Belongs by Richard Rohr
- 3. The Grace in Aging by Kathleen Dowling Singh
- 4. The Grace in Dying by Kathleen Dowling Singh
- 5. On The Brink of Everything by Parker J. Palmer
- 6. Resilience by Eric Grietens
- 7. <u>In Heaven As On Earth</u> by Dr. M Scott Peck
- 8. The Couples Workbook by The School of Life
- 9. Listening For the Heartbeat of God by Dr. John Phillip Newell
- 10. Sitting With God by Rich Lewis
- 11. How To Life Forever by Marc Freedman
- 12. A Brief History of Everything by Ken Wilber
- 13. Just Listen by Mark Goulston, MD
- 14. The Art of Loving by Erich Fromm
- 15. Touching the Eternal by Eckhart Tolle
- 16. See No Stranger by Valarie Kaur
- 17. The Soul's Slow Ripening by Christine Paintner
- 18. How to Be an Elder by Clarissa Pinkola Estes
- 19. The Art of Letting Go by Richard Rohr
- 20. Love is the Way by Michael Curry, Sara Grace
- 21. Daring Greatly by Brene Brown
- 22. Into the Silent Land by Martin Laird
- 23. The Book of Soul by Mark Nepo
- 24. Meister Eckhart's Living Wisdom by James Finley
- 25. A Year to Live by Stephen Levine
- 26. The Top Five Regrets of the Dying by Bronnie Ware
- 27. What Retirees Want by Dr. Ken Dychtwald, Robert Morris
- 28. Everything is Spiritual by Rob Bell
- 29. The Four Loves by C. S. Lewis
- 30. Awakening the Soul by Michael Meade
- 31. New Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton

- 32. Wisdom at Work by Chip Conley
- 33. Following Jesus by Henri Nouwen
- 34. The Second Half of Life by Angeles Arrien
- 35. The Ecstasy of Surrender by Judith Orloff, MD
- 36. No Death, No Fear by Thich Nhat Hahn
- 37. How to Be a Holy Rascal by Rabbi Rami Shapiro
- 38. The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle
- 39. Interior Castle by Teresa of Avila
- 40. Wild Mercy by Mirabai Starr
- 41. Life of the Beloved by Henri Nouwen
- 42. The Second Mountain by David Brooks
- 43. The Problem of Pain by C. S. Lewis
- 44. I've Decided to Live 120 Years by Iichi Lee
- 45. The Wisdom Jesus by Cynthia Bourgeault
- 46. <u>Unconditional Love</u> by Jane Isay
- 47. The Contemplative Journey by Thomas Keating
- 48. Learning to Walk in the Dark by Barbara Brown Taylor
- 49. The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman by Howard Thurman
- 50. A Hidden Wholeness by Parker J. Palmer

For more information contact: M. David Bradshaw ideaman@myideafactory.net – 602.918.3296

Telling The Story of Your Life

A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Writing Your Memoirs and Autobiography in 8 Weeks!

Hello, my name is David Bradshaw, founder of My Idea Factory. As a writer, editor and publisher for over 30 years, I want to help you create a series of memoirs... and then assemble them into an autobiography.

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