

# Five Steps For Writing The Story of YOU



By Devon Noel Lee, Owner of Family History Fanatics

Visualize holding a book featuring a loved one who no longer walks the earth. Alas, it's a vision, not a reality, and all you're left with is a desperate wish the dream was true. Don't let this ache and longing happen to your family members. Learn how to simplify the personal history writing process and tell your story, even if you lack creativity or flair with words.

## Your Story Matters

Do you remember the television show *"Everybody Has a Story"* with Steve Hartman? For nearly a decade, he traveled from coast to coast and from northern to southern borders across America, randomly stopping at stranger's homes and recording their stories.

After 100 stories, he reflected, *"I never dreamed you could actually find good stories like that. Turns out I couldn't have been more wrong."* (Mind you, his initial idea for the stories started out as a joke.)<sup>1</sup>

In each episode I watched (many of which you can find on YouTube), folks didn't think they had a story worth sharing. By the end of two days, Steve and his team proved them wrong.

If you use these words (boring, dull, humdrum, monotonous, unimpactful, unimpressive, mundane, stupid, tame, trite, or uninteresting) to describe your life, you couldn't be more wrong.

Your story is a crucial part of family history, even more so than finding a new ancestor to add to a family tree or writing source citations.

Stop procrastinating and making excuses. **RECORD YOUR STORY NOW.**

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<sup>1</sup>Hartman, Steve. "Everybody Has A Story, Flashbacks." CBS News, CBS Interactive, 11 Jan. 2010, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/everybody-has-a-story-flashbacks/>.

# Five Steps For Writing

## The Story of YOU



### 5 Steps for Success

The following are five proven and efficient steps to create a library of stories about Y-O-U:

1. Record Your Photo's Stories
2. Arrange Stories Chronologically
3. Add Heart and Soul
4. Handle the Hard
5. Ask for Feedback

(The class will dive deep into the 5 Steps. The following additional tips will help you write your stories.)

### Tools For Recording Your Stories

Your ultimate goal should involve a published book or an audio/video presentation that your family can enjoy again and again. To reach that end product, begin using some of the following:

#### Recording Stories:

- **Paper and Pen:** High tech they are not, but if writing memories long-hand helps you record your stories, then do not look for tech solutions when these will do. During the editing phase, you can hire someone to type up your writing for inclusion in books.
- **Text editing program:** For those who type faster than they can handwrite, use a native digital program. From MS Word, Apple Pages, OpenOffice Writer, or Google Docs, recording

your memories in these programs reduces the need to convert your stories at a later date. And, if you ever want to publish a book of stories and photos, you can export the file to a PDF and use Lulu.com to create a book.

- **Journaling App:** Create entries in a journaling app and add photos to create a finished project that you can publish in a book or transfer to a writing program for further editing. The apps help you record your stories on the go with ease. Some apps include Journey and Day One.
- **Text-to-Speech Software:** Dragon Dictation, Google Voice to Text, and other programs can turn your speech to text. I have found these programs slow and awkward. Instead, speak into an audio or video recorder and transcribe the files.
- **Audio Recording:** Capture a clear audio file using an audio recorder. The Zoom H1 Handy Recorder is a portable audio recording device for on-the-go interviews, especially in loud environments. Pair it with an inexpensive lavalier (lapel) microphone for ease of recording.
- **Video Recording:** Using your smartphone's video recorder or purchasing a digital video camera may suit you well to speak your stories. Be sure to use at minimum a lavalier mic or an external microphone to ensure high audio quality.
- **Transcription Service:** Quickly transform your audio or video recording into text using either Rev.com or Temi.com. You may still have to edit the generated manuscript, but you'll be grateful for the time saved transcribing your words.

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### Phases of Writing and Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Memory Recording** - capture the stories from your mind and heart and convert them into text or an audio or video file.
  - *Let the memories flow how they wish.* Jump from story to story. Tell it wrong and correct it later. Do not force yourself to capture memories in a rigid order.
  - *Ignore your audience* - Do not filter your memories for a specific audience. Audience selection comes LATER. Allow your thoughts to flow without regard to the level of graphic detail, language, or content maturity level.
- **Story Organization** - arrange the stories in such a way that shares your life and the lessons you learned.
  - *Arrange chronologically first.* This arrangement helps you find gaps. After filling in the missing elements, you can arrange your content to meet your story's needs.
  - *Break your story up into smaller stories.* If you served in the military for 20 years, break out the military years from the comprehensive personal history into its own project. Then further subdivide the military years into smaller topics as needed.
- **Drafting**- Write the details that guide your reader from memory to memory with ease.
  - *Turn Off Your Inner Critic and Editor* - Leave spelling, grammar, and content editing until after you complete your first draft. Editing the content and mechanics comes later.
  - *Give Yourself Breaks* - Some topics are difficult to write about emotionally. Write as much as you are able, then set the project aside. Return a week, a month, or even a year and add more insights. It works surprisingly well.
  - *Consult Support Material* - Don't rely solely on your memory. Revisit journals, newspaper articles, programs, memorabilia, and such to add forgotten details.
- **Editing** - Editing is more than fixing commas and should not happen until you have the bulk of your story written. The editing flows in this order:
  - **Developmental Editing**- investigate the setting, story structure, potential audience for the book, pacing, and style.
  - **Copy & Line Editing** - correct typos and spelling errors along with correcting grammar, language (such as explaining jargon), and syntax errors
  - **Proofreading** - The final check for typos, spelling mistakes, inconsistencies (i.e., using USA or United States) before publishing.

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## Writing Prompts:

- Gonchar, Michael. "500 Prompts for Narrative and Personal Writing." *The New York Times*, 13 Nov. 2014, <https://nyti.ms/2LfL5Ao>
- Larsson Belliston, Nancy. "41 Best Prompts to Help You Write Your Personal History Images in 2019: Prompts, Writing, Journal Prompts." *Pinterest*, 11 Jan. 2019, <https://bit.ly/381Eovg>
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- Tartakovsky, Margarita. "30 Journaling Prompts for Self-Reflection and Self-Discovery." *World of Psychology*, 8 July 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LgPgMj>.

## Memoir Writing How-To Books:

- Dustman, Karen. *Writing A Memoir: From Stuck to Finished!: Helpful Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Family History and Putting Life Stories on Paper*. Clairitage Press, 2019.
- Taylor, Tom, and Alison. *How to Save Your Life - One Chapter at a Time*. Picture and Stories, 2015. <https://bit.ly/35YWBYM>

## YouTube Videos

- kn literary. "What the Best Memoirs Have in Common: Tips for Writing Your Story." *YouTube*, commentary by Kelly Notaras, 31 May 2019, <https://youtu.be/nzMrNDxuct0>.
- The Creative Penn. "How To Fast Draft Your Memoir With Rachael Herron." *YouTube*, commentary by Joanna Penn, 18 Feb. 2018, <https://youtu.be/uhb9HFv4ckY>.
- Family History Fanatics. "Why Write a Family History When No One Cares?" *YouTube*, commentary by Devon Noel Lee, 21 Feb. 2019, <https://youtu.be/nHd9rR1iKsQ>.
- Family History Fanatics. "5 Simple Prewriting Tips." *YouTube*, commentary by Devon Noel Lee, 7 Jul. 2017, <https://youtu.be/9hSnzf1jFeU>.
- Family History Fanatics. "Preserve The Stories of Your Possessions." *YouTube*, commentary by Devon Noel Lee, 8 Jun. 2017, <https://youtu.be/s1dli-dwB9Q>.
- Family History Fanatics. "First Draft Writing Tip - Ignore Your Audience." *YouTube*, commentary by Devon Noel Lee, 21 Sep. 2017, <https://youtu.be/-gx6hp0p004>.
- Family History Fanatics. "What Were You Feeling? Memoir Writing Tip." *YouTube*, commentary by Devon Noel Lee, 19 Aug. 2017, <https://youtu.be/2iY9Rh7vVg4>.
- Family History Fanatics. "Adding Drama to Your Family History Writing Projects." *YouTube*, commentary by Devon Noel Lee, 21 Dec. 2017, <https://youtu.be/HWPgp9GQGBA>.

## Memoir Inspiration:

- Lee, Devon Noel. *From Metal to Rhinestones: A Quest for the Crown*. FHF Group, LLC, 2016.

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- Lee, Andrew. *How to Fail English with Style*. FHF Group, LLC, 2017.