The One-Year Collection of Weekly Writing Prompts

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Write Your Life Story, One Question at a Time

Dalene Bickel

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No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author. To my ancestors who intrigue me, my God who sustains me, and my children who complete me.

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The Importance of Your Life Experiences

I'm a firm believer that *everyone* has a life story worth writing. The benefits of documenting your life experiences are many, including personal growth and discovery.

In addition, when you're willing to share the ups and the downs of your life story with others, you're able to leave a legacy that can benefit your current family members as well as future generations. Sharing your beliefs, values and wisdom in anecdotal form enables your children and grandchildren to connect with you on a deeper level. And your personal experiences offer an opportunity to educate, empower and inspire others.

Still not convinced that your experiences matter? Consider these statistics from a survey conducted by Allianz Life Insurance Company:

"Americans age 65+ value family stories more than money by a ratio of 3:1."

The Allianz American Legacies Pulse Survey, Allianz Life Insurance Company, 2012

In addition, Allianz found that 75% of Baby Boomers and 53% of elders (those age 72 and older) agreed with the following statement: "It is extremely important to me that future generations remember my parents and what mattered to them."

Yet maybe your life feels as monotonous as a plain piece of paper: there's nothing distinguishing about it; nothing exciting. As an 80-year-old woman once told me, "I doubt I'd ever write my story. I never had a career; I only volunteered and raised a family. I don't have anything noteworthy to share."

To me, such a mindset is a travesty. You don't have to have worked your way up the corporate ladder or have been born into royalty to have a story worth sharing. Your life experiences, whatever they are, have meaning. Within the daily grind of life, you learned important lessons, and you can offer a first-person account of various historical events.

It makes me think about Laura Ingalls Wilder and her *Little House on the Prairie* books. She didn't consider her life to be exceptional, nor did she set out to write a best-selling book. And I doubt she ever imagined her family's life would one day be portrayed in a weekly television program.

No, she merely documented her personal experiences for herself and her family. So she wrote simply. She wrote descriptively. She wrote about what was most important to her. And because she was willing to share her thoughts and experiences, she captivated the hearts and minds of countless people.

My point is that you shouldn't sell yourself short. You DO have an interesting story to share.

As Mark Twain once said, "There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is an impossibility. Inside the dullest exterior, there is a drama, a comedy, and a tragedy."

REFLECTIONS

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

Søren Kierkegaard

HOW HAVE HISTORICAL EVENTS AFFECTED YOU?

Consider all of the major historical events that have occurred in your lifetime, both in this country and around the world. These might include events such as the Vietnam conflict, tearing down the Berlin Wall, 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina.

List the events that have had a significant impact on you—whether they've directly affected you and your family or have simply caused you to think differently about an issue.

Beside each one, jot down your approximate age at the time, what memories of the event stand out most vividly in your mind and what you've learned from the experience.





HOW HAS TECHNOLOGY EVOLVED DURING YOUR LIFETIME?

It's staggering to think how quickly technology has completely changed the way people work, play and converse with each other. Regardless of whether you're a traditionalist or a change agent, you undoubtedly rely on certain technological marvels every day.

Document the technology you used as a child and how those items have evolved over the years. (Rotary phones, basic refrigerators, and black-andwhite television sets immediately come to mind.)

Feel free to also include new technology that has been introduced in your adulthood, as well as technology that perhaps you don't use yourself but you find fascinating. (Electric cars or 3-D printers, anyone?)





HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR LIFE TO DATE?

Maybe you can sum up your life in one sentence, or maybe you need a couple of paragraphs—or even a page or two. Whatever the length, the goal is to summarize your life in a descriptive manner.

To help you get started, consider if any themes have emerged throughout your life. Maybe you've lived a life of adventure, full of unique experiences. Or a life of service, always looking for a way to help others. These are just examples; there are many other ways that you could choose to describe your life. Be creative and have fun!





IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME AND DO ONE THING DIFFERENTLY, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Many of us can think of at least one instance in which we wish we could have a do-over. Maybe we would like to rectify a relationship ... or avoid a relationship altogether. Maybe we would like to follow through on a particular aspiration instead of allowing our fears—or the advice of others—to prevent us from taking action.

This week, consider how your life trajectory might have changed if you had done something differently. What would you change if you could?





WHAT ARE YOU MOST CONCERNED ABOUT FOR THE FUTURE?

I think it's safe to say that people have many concerns about the future, both individually and collectively as a society.

Perhaps you're wondering if your current savings are going to be enough to send your kids through college or last you through your retirement. Maybe you own a business and are concerned about how you'll keep up with technology. Maybe you're concerned about an increase in world tensions.

The purpose of this exercise is not to feed your fears but to acknowledge them in order to plan appropriately. List some advice or action steps you and others can take to minimize or avoid the feared negative outcomes. If you're bolstered by your faith, share how that strengthens and encourages you regardless of the circumstances.



HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?

This is an important question. Maybe you want to be remembered differently to different people (e.g., as a loving parent to your children and as a results-oriented but fair employer). Maybe you can summarize what's most important about your life in a single sentence, or maybe you need to expound for several pages. Regardless of how simple or complex your thoughts are in response to this question, write them all down.

As with all of the previous writing prompts, there are no right or wrong answers. The key is to be honest. For example, you might share that you want to be remembered as someone who has tried to put others first, even though you know you haven't always succeeded. Consider adding examples when appropriate.

In closing, reflect on your life as a whole, and describe how you want to be remembered.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dalene Bickel is the founder of Lasting Legacies and serves as a nonfiction book coach and editor. She has ghostwritten and coauthored numerous books, including *Plant and Grow Your Money: A Financial Guide for Young Adults*. Her writing has also appeared in blogs, magazines and the Chicken Soup for the Soul book *The Multitasking Mom's Survival Guide*.

She has served as a panelist at the Biographers International Conference and regularly speaks on the topics of legacy and life story writing.

When not working, she enjoys spending time in God's Word, making memories with her two boys, reading, traveling and trying new things.

Follow Dalene on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

http://www.lasting-legacies.net