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Life Story Writing Tips...

The key to writing your life story is to make it as interesting as the life you've led. But how do you do that? Where do you start? All you need to do is open your mind to your memories, and let them take you where they will go.

Is that all it really takes? Yes, when you know the tips that celebrated writers and spell-binding storytellers have discovered through their own years of hard work. When you follow these truly simple tips, you'll discover a richness in both your life and your words that you did not realize before.

Tip 1: Write every day. You go to the muse, it does not come to you. Write every day, whether you "feel like it" or not. As the Nike slogan says, "Just do it!"

Tip 2: Write what comes to your mind. Do not try to write chronologically. When a particular thought catches your attention, that's what you're ready to write about. Later on, your stories can be arranged chronologically, with transitions that let you move them through time.

Tip 3: Start writing and don't stop. Keep your pen or pencil moving until you've said all you have to say. That may take you 5 minutes, it may take you several sessions when you keep coming back to the same story. Once you sit down to write, keep writing without stopping to make corrections or to think. When you do, your internal critic—your "monkey mind"—wants to take over. It will whisper "You can't say that! Say this instead! Change this, change that. This doesn't sound good. You're not a writer. Just quit!"

Ignore the monkey mind. You are a writer. Your stories are good. Just write, and keep on writing. Don't stop. If you do stop, stuck for what to write next, try this: write "I remember..." and keep on writing. Or write "I don't remember..." and keep on writing.

Tip 4: Go where your words take you. Let yourself write whatever comes to mind. Sometimes you'll start our writing about one thing, but end up writing about another. That's perfectly okay, because memories are intertwined. When you're finished, you'll be surprised to discover something new, something you might not have been aware of.

Tip 5: Be specific. Details give your words presence. Write "jonquils," not "flowers." Write "Chevy" or "Ford" or "flivver," not "car." But if you don't

Our stories are our breath into the future, as memories are the shadows of our past.

remember the specific, that's okay too—go ahead and write “I don't know what kind of a tree it was but it was so tall that I thought I could climb straight up and touch the clouds.”

Tip 6: Use all your senses. Hear the sound of the canoe paddle swooshing into the water. Taste the warm bread fresh from your mother's oven. See the shimmering reds and oranges of the sunset. Smell the new-mown hay warming under the late summer morning sun. Feel the stubble of your dad's beard and his strong arms as he carried you, half-asleep, off to your bed.

Tip 7: Be there now. This is another way to “be specific.” Take a moment before you begin to write. Close your eyes. Carry yourself back, in your mind, to the time and place you want to write about. Feel the feelings you had then. Experience your memories as you're writing them, and your readers will share that experience.

Tip 8: It's okay, and natural, to be scared sometimes when you're writing. Emotions imprint themselves with chemical signals that resurface when a strong memory is recalled. When we write about something that frightened us, we may again feel the fear. When we write about something that saddened us, our tears will again flow. That's okay. Keep writing—write through the fear, write through the tears. When you're done, you'll realize two things: you did not die, and you actually feel better, lighter, unburdened, and more alive.

Tip 9: Tell the truth. Not the “truth” you think others expect of you, nor what someone else insists is the truth. No two people, not even identical twins, can experience the exact same thing in the exact same way. Write what *you* remember. Write *your* truth.

Tip 10: Spelling, punctuation, and grammar do not count. At least, not yet (that's for later, when you're polishing your stories). For now, pay not attention to them at all. Since none of your school teachers is in this class, no one is going to grade you or tell you you're no Shakespeare. So what? Shakespeare didn't live your life—how could he write your stories?!

Tip 11: Write *to* somebody. Pretend that each story you're writing is a letter to someone you love, someone alive or someone long gone. Write to just that one person alone. And remember, that person just might be you.

Tip 12: This is the most important “rule” of all. This is your life story. You get to share what you want. You do not have to share anything you do not want to. You are not obligated to tell any more about your life than you want. *Be kind to yourself.*