

A Guide to writing your memoirs for

“My Life and My Memories of BFES/SCEA Education”

First ... Why write memoirs?

We all have a story to tell and here are some of the reasons why it might be a good idea to record it.

- Memoirs have a historical value which might prove interesting to future generations.
- It's a way of leaving a legacy for family and friends.
- Looking back on life can help make sense of it.
- You may learn more about yourself.
- The task offers a valuable opportunity to practise your writing skills.
- Writing your memoirs can be therapeutic.
- It gives you the chance to revisit important memories and set them down in a chronological order.
- You may have regretted not asking your parents and grandparents details of their lives. If you have children, they won't encounter this problem if you leave them your written memoirs.
- The activity provides much food for thought and is a good way to boost brain power.
- You can share a selection of your memories with BFES/SCEA Association to be stored in official archives to support future researchers in understanding life in MOD schools before all the school closures
- You can also share some parts to be published in either the Bulletin or Journal for other members to read and enjoy.

Before you get Started.....

Writing your memoir be a bit bewildering, and seem an overwhelming task. The template has been designed to offer you a step-by-step guide to make the task easier. Just follow the guide and write the stories that are important to you. Part 1 is a summary for each year of your life – keep it short and factual.

The template is designed to suit all members, regardless of their connection to MOD schools – teachers, pupils, administrators, advisors etc Just adapt the pages to reflect your experiences.

Each section of Part 2 suggests a different topic to write about and starts of in chronological order, but then breaks into topics. Remember, as the pages of Part 2 are not numbered, you can reorder the pages as you wish. (this might be easier to do once completed and printed!)

You can delete any section you would prefer not to complete, and add new sections that you would like to record. There are suggestions for topics at the end of this guide in the Appendices.

Be honest; writing your memoirs is a unique opportunity to tell your story just as it is, but there may be events you don't wish to record. You don't have to reveal all.

Try not to ramble and write too much! Keep it simple and direct to get your point across.

Consider gathering materials together than may be of interest and illustrate your story: letters, photographs, old diaries, school reports and other documents can all be included.

So...read on, and off you go!

Step 1: title page and setting up

- Don't forget to refer to this Guide if you need help.
- Begin with your title page – one is suggested - you can change the title if you wish to do so but if you're not too sure, you can always decide later.
- You might want to experiment with different fonts and font sizes. The Step-by-Step Guide uses the Calibri Font, but some parts use the Lucida Calligraphy Font. There are so many different choices!

ALTERNATIVELY, rather than word-process your memoir, you can print the template and hand-write your memoirs. The **Membership Secretaries** will send you a hard copy to write in. Once complete, your memoir can be photocopied and shared – again, the Membership Secretaries are more than happy to help you to do this.

- You can add photographs or drawings to the title page if you wish to make it more “yours”...
- When you have completed your memoir, delete any of the pages that you have not used. You can then send the whole OR part of the memoir that you would like to share to the Membership Secretaries to be archived! Also, you can give permission for one or more sections/pages to be published in the Bulletin or the Journey. This is your choice!
- You can of course, also share your memoir with your family, and so keep a record of your achievements and interests for future family members to read and enjoy.

Step Two: Part 1: My life journey - Timeline Grids

- Find your starting decade timeline grid – your birth year - deleting the grids that don't apply to you.
- Then, beginning with your birth year, carry on completing each decade by writing brief notes against each year until you reach the present year.

OR if you only wish to complete the memoir for your BFES/SCEA years, just go straight to Part 2!

- Keep the entries in Part 1 brief and to the point; save the details for the next section of the memoirs
- You can add or take away any of the information in the “World Events column” to suit your interests and experiences – what is there is just a starting place

Step Three: Delving deeper – Part 2 of your memoir

- Part 2 of the memoir has a choice of clearly labelled pages which will enable you to present a deeper, personal insight into your story.
- It will be necessary to consider the pages which are relevant for you. Leave out those that are not of interest or relevant to your life story. For example, if you were a teacher you might not write about “My Working Life”, but if you were a pupil, then this topic is much more relevant!
- Some of the topic pages have words that might trigger memories for you around the drawing at the top.
- In addition to writing your story, you may want to add photographs, personal drawings, additional illustrations, maps or other documents.

The Appendices

- In Appendix 1 there are suggestions for more topics that you might like to include in your memoirs.
- Appendix 2 has a small collection poems that you might wish to use to conclude your memoir.
- And Appendix 3 list the original authors of the template from Lichfield U3A who generously gave permission to adapt and use their work for our Association.

Appendix A:

Further Suggestions:

If you plan to share your memoirs with family and friends, you may wish to expand to include additional pages in Part 2 of the memoirs.

Topics could include:

- My family history- “My family: Previous Generations”
- “My family: the next Generation: children and Grandchildren”.
- My family tree
- Places I have lived
- My working life
- Pets and animals in my life
- My health through the years
- Gardening days
- My world of music
- Favourite books and poems
- The place of religion and spirituality in my life
- Favourite foods through the decades
- Holidays/explorations at home and abroad
- The covid pandemic and its impact
- The world of fashion
- Creative Arts and Entertainment
- Changes in everyday living in the UK since my birth
- Transport changes through the years
- My best friends
- “From here I can go anywhere I choose”

Appendix B Poetry

In this Appendix, we, the original Guide authors, intend to carry on to a “Step Four” and include poems in our memoirs. We thought you might be interested in our choices, and they may encourage you to include a favourite poem of your own.

The Dash (Linda Ellis)

I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on his casket from beginning to the end.
He noted that first came the date of his birth, and spoke of the following date
with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.
For that dash represents all the time that he spent alive on earth,
And now, only those who loved him know what that little line is worth.
For it matters not, how much we own, the cars, the house, the cash,
What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.
So think about this long and hard; are there things you would like to change?
For you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged.
If we could just slow down enough to consider what is true and real
And always try to understand the way other people feel.
And be less quick to anger and show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives like we have never loved before.
If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile,
Remembering that this special dash might only last a little while.
So when your eulogy is being read, with your life’s actions to rehash,
Would you be proud of the things they say, about how you spent your dash

This poem reflects how powerful writing your memoirs can be. It’s an activity which requires that we slow down to consider ‘what is true and real’ and might reveal ‘things we would like to change.’ Food for thought. Veronica Birkett 3A

The Road Not Taken (Robert Frost)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

This poem reminds us that life is a series of choices that we need to make and that we cannot see how one choice may result in a different outcome. We can only do our best and make the decision which is at the time right for us and shouldn't regret decisions made by reflecting on them with the advantage of hindsight.

Pauline Williams 4A

Reflections (Alora Knight)

There are moments in our life we'll always treasure.
Tiny fragments from our past, remembered pleasure.
Maybe it will be a song somebody sings,
Or the fragrance of a rose, a memory brings.
Somewhere in the background of our mind
Comes reflections of the love we left behind.
Though it's nice to think of days that brought us gladness,
Yet we can't escape the ones that brought us sadness.
Still, would we fully understand another's pain?
Unless sometime within our lives we'd felt the same?
The dust of time drifts softly through the years.
Just to read our book of life may bring forth tears.
For seldom does one live a lifetime through
Without regretting things they did or did not do.
Yet would we really want to live without it all?
For we're a part of everything that we recall.

Writing your life story is a reflection of the life you have led, remembering the good times, understanding the bad, making sense of your life.

❖ Pauline Huckfield

Appendix 3:

Source and thanks to the authors of the original template and guide to writing memoirs – here is their story:

“Veronica Birkett, a long-standing member of Lichfield u3a was keen to write her memoirs but had difficulty in getting started. Prolonged searches on the Internet, looking for inspiration, advice and a template suitable for her needs, proved disappointing.

Realising there must be others experiencing similar difficulties, she placed an advertisement in the Lichfield u3a Monthly Newsletter, looking for like-minded members in the hope of establishing a ‘Memoirs Working Party.’ The aim of this group would be to devise a clear, meaningful template which would take account of the individual lives, needs and interests of everyone with a desire to write their own life stories. Pauline Huckfield and Pauline Williams and others responded to the plea and following a helpful Zoom Meeting with the u3a Living History subject adviser, Jo Livingston, a working party was established.

What you have here is the result of their mutual determination to produce the type of template they hadn’t been able to find elsewhere.

The group were fortunate to be joined in their endeavour by a talented artist, Mary Bailey, a Lichfield u3a member who is providing the illustrations. Pete Gostling, another member, provided his invaluable technical assistance and thanks also go to Judith Thorpe for her support

We sincerely hope you find our template useful. You may complete your life story online or obtain a hard copy via the Lichfield u3a website.

Veronica Birkett
Pauline Huckfield
Pauline Williams
Mary Shimmell Bailey (Artist)”

Permission to adapt the original:

To:You
Cc:Pauline Huckfield;pauline williams

Wed 21/02/2024 21:04

Hello Christine

At last every member of the Lichfield committee have agreed to your request of adapting our template and they all wish you the best of luck with it.

So you’re free to proceed, but thanks for asking. You could have used it and we’d have been oblivious!

Best wishes

Veronica Pauline H and Pauline W😊😊😊