

A Story a Day

"Your life is unique and worthwhile. You have a story to tell. It just needs to be sorted and refined." – Katie Funk Wiebe

65 one-word prompts

Bills	Grief	Beginnings	Wedded	Cousin
Success	Winter	Dislike	Cemetery	Heart
Hello	Mug	Etiquette	Broken	Rains
Oops	Change	Word	Serendipitous	Place
Driver	Sister	Missing	Birthday	Christmas
Friend	Bookstore	Breakfast	Fridge	Ache
Wisdom	Talent	Laundry	Remote	Letter
Lawnmower	Daffodil	Sunglasses	Hanger	Chopsticks
Crosswalk	Chalkboard	Key	Cane	Armchair
Rotary	Postcard	Wagon	Desk	Lunchbox
Locket	Label	Stockings	Silence	Spotted
Suitcase	Retirement	Teddy	Ocean	Melody
Routine	Regret	Test	Laughter	Lost

20 question prompts

Not sure where to start? Here are some questions that you can use as a jumping off place in your memoir.

- What dishes could tell the story of your life?
- Tell about a kitchen disaster you once had.
- What were your favourite toys as a child?
- What is some of the best advice your mother/father ever gave you?
- How did you get to school as a child?
- What is your favourite story about your (grand) father/ (grand) mother?
- Tell about a song that brings back an interesting memory from your youth.
- How do you like to spend a lazy day?
- Have you played any great pranks?
- What are some of your family traditions?
- Which fads did you embrace while growing up?
- Did you ever get in trouble at school as a child?
- Describe your favourite summer memories.
- Did you have any nicknames as a child? How did you feel about them?
- What are some of your favourite sounds?
- What do you consider one of your greatest achievements in life?
- Are you superstitious? What are you superstitious about?
- What was the neighbourhood you grew up in like?
- What do you worry about?
- Who has been one of the most important people in your life?

MEMOIR WRITING ACTIVITY PROMPTS

1. Create a timeline of your life. Divide your life into key life stages. List the years, your age, and major events that happened (schooling, siblings born, deaths, etc.) Brainstorm a list of stories to write in each stage: think of

significant people, places, events, objects, traditions, memories with high emotional impact, smells, sounds, tastes, significant historical events, etc.

2. Draw a floorplan of the house where you lived and add furniture outlines. Alongside, list events that happened in the different rooms. You could also draw a map of your neighbourhood, identifying people and places you visited. "Trace your path from your house to school or some other place you went to frequently, and note what you saw and heard along the way." [Katie Funk Wiebe]
3. Pick a favourite family recipe and write down a memory or story to go with it. Make a special recipe card with the story and a photo and send it to your relatives or create a blog post.
4. Post a family photo on social media and ask your family members to share their memories about the photo with you. What was happening? Who was there? Combine the memories into a short story.
5. Select foods that represent each decade of your life. Write a mini-memoir of your life through food. Add photos and recipes and share with your family.
6. Interview a family member, asking some of the interview prompt questions above. Record their answers and use them in your family history.

WRITING & TRANSCRIPTION TOOLS

Pro Writing Aid: grammar checker and style editor to help strengthen your writing <https://prowritingaid.com>

Scrivener: a management system for documents, notes, concepts and research www.literatureandlatte.com

OTranscribe.com: a free web app that makes it easier for you to transcribe recorded interviews

Otter.ai or *Rev.com*: for fee online services that offer automatic transcription (various packages available)

Story worth: Emails prompts to share memories, that are then shared in a book. www.storyworth.com

52 Ancestors in 52 Weeks: Weekly prompts to get you to think about and share something about an ancestor.

<https://www.amyjohnsoncrow.com/52ancestors52weeks/>

READING RESOURCES

Some classic books and links on how to become a better writer and tips for creating a writing habit and writing about your life.

Clark, Roy Peter. (2016). *Writing tools: 55 essential strategies for every writer*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

Clear, James. "How to build new habits by taking advantage of old ones." Retrieved from: <https://jamesclear.com/habit-stacking>

King, Stephen. (2020). *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. 20th Anniversary Edition. New York, NY: Scribner.

Lamott, Anne. (2019). *Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life*. 25th Anniversary Edition: New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Strunk, William Jr. & White, E.B. (1999). *The elements of style*. 4th edition. Toronto, ON: Pearson Canada.

Wiebe, Katie Funk. (2017). *How to write your personal or family history: (If you don't do it, who will?)*. New York, NY: Good Books, Inc.

Zinsser, William. (2004). *Writing about your life: A journey into the past*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Zinsser, William. (2006). *On writing well: The classic guide to writing nonfiction*. 30th Anniversary Edition. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.