

Family Storytelling 101

“The personal essay is as much about the author’s quest, the attempt, to find and/or understand past lives, as it is about the ancestor. The author doesn’t have to have all the answers and doesn’t have to reach conclusions. The reader is coming along for the journey, the experience, the sense of discovery the author makes along the way.” – Sharon DeBartolo Carmack (“You Don’t Have to Write a Book”)

PERSONAL ESSAY TIPS

1. Start your story with a **hook** to engage the interest of the reader: start at an exciting part of the story and use flashback to fill in the gaps
 - Flashback technique – start in the middle of the story, then use flashbacks to fill in the gaps
 - Open with an unusual or exciting event, or a turning point in someone’s life
 - Create an air of mystery
 - Humour
 - Rhetorical question
 - Provocative statement
 - Shock/surprise
2. Have a **quest**: what questions or mysteries are you trying to solve?
3. Use **vivid description**
4. Develop believable, sympathetic **characters**
5. Pull research from many **sources** to fill in the **details** of your story: oral history interviews, photos, letters, diaries, newspapers, maps, social and local history books.
6. Include a **beginning, middle and end** with a plot that advances your quest

DIARY + LETTER TIPS and EXAMPLES

Options:

- Scan + reproduce original diary (and that's it)
- Transcribe (original copy + typed copy)
- Commentary + explanation (add photos + artefacts)

Considerations when deciding what format to do:

- Who is your audience?
- How much time do you have?
- How much money do you have?

What is your purpose?

- Duplication for preservation
- Explanation and better understanding

Stop Go by Joe Creegan

www.blurb.ca/b/7020747-stop-go

1931 Buck Hyer Diary by Bruce Hyer

www.blurb.ca/b/6821575-1931-buck-hyer-diary

A Diary of the Boer War by Peter Caulfield

www.blurb.ca/b/3706576-a-diary-of-the-boer-war

Uncle Alf’s Letters by Gill Gill

www.blurb.ca/b/5069040-uncle-alf-s-letters

Your Most Welcome Letter by Sharon Murphy Mohrlock

www.blurb.ca/b/1783345-your-most-welcome-letter

COOKBOOK EXAMPLES

Pawmaw's Cookbook by Marie Maines www.blurb.ca/b/7328378-pamaw-s-cookbook

Nos Dimanches à la Carpière – www.blurb.ca/b/7209956-nos-dimanches-la-carpi-re
Recettes de ma grand-mère Hélène by Vincent Girodet

Dear Elizabeth by Deborah LeMoine www.blurb.ca/b/7177690-dear-elizabeth-softcover-kitchen-edition

PHOTO ALBUM EXAMPLES

Katharine Wells Netting Photo Album – From the Collection of Katharine Ruth Helfer Hess Editor F. Scott Hess
www.blurb.ca/b/1051474-the-katharine-wells-netting-photo-album

Photo Album Redux – Brogan Family Photos from 1945 to 1959 by Becki Broan Bishop
www.blurb.ca/b/1286300-photo-album-redux

BLOGS

WHY and HOW to Start a Family History Blog – <https://lisalouisecooke.com/start-family-history-blog/>

TIPS for Improving your Genealogy Blog –
<https://lisalouisecooke.com/2016/10/3-ways-to-improve-your-genealogy-blog/>

GeneaBloggers Tribe – <http://geneabloggerstribes.com>

RECOMMENDED READS

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. *Tell it short: A guide to writing your family history in brief*. Salt Lake City, UT: Scattered Leaves Press, 2016.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. "Switched at Midlife". *Hippocampus Magazine*.
<http://www.hippocampusmagazine.com/2012/01/switched-at-midlife-by-sharon-carmack/>.

Carmack, Sharon DeBartolo. "You Don't Have to Write a Book".
<http://www.familyhistorywritingchallenge.com/members-only/article-archives/guest-authors/you-dont-have-to-write-a-book/>

Livingston, Sonja. "A Thousand Mary Doyles". *Brevity*, Issue 46, May 2014. <http://brevitymag.com/nonfiction/a-thousand-mary-doyles/>

Livingston, Sonja. "The Opposite of the Composite: How One Girl Became a Thousand". *Brevity*, May 14, 2014.
<https://brevity.wordpress.com/2014/05/14/the-opposite-of-the-composite-how-one-girl-became-a-thousand/>

Palermo, Lynn. Write Your Family History Series: 1. Getting Ready to Write (2015), 2. Authentic Ancestors (2015) 3. Finding the Story (2015) 4. Crafting a Scene (2017).

Phillips, Elisa. "Grandfather". *The Penmen Review*. 2014. <http://penmenreview.com/grandfather/>