

## Legacy: Ideas for writing your personal history

### AIMs:

- To create a gift to your descendants and to people that you will never know.
- To preserve and reveal honestly the essence of your life, both easily and comfortably.

WRITING STYLE: There is a need to separate factual information from your 'spin' on people and events. The situations you were in and your reactions to them need different approaches. The more detail you give, the more there will be a chance for the social history of the times of your lifespan to be revealed. All writing is 'for an audience' but with a legacy there is no way of knowing who will read your account and of any judgements that could be made.

### Possible Content Headings

#### **Grandparents :**

Names, births, marriages, deaths, physical appearances and clothes, where they lived, what they did, skills and talents, your contacts and relationships with them, their homes, the stories they told, their brothers and sisters. On a personal level, any special activities shared, personal traits and ways they may have influenced you.

#### **Parents:**

As above for grandparents plus what they told you about when they were young, how they met, their wedding and their adult lives before you were born. On a personal level, how they fulfilled their role as parents, their strengths and weaknesses and how they changed as they grew older.

#### **Childhood:**

Where and when you were born, your earliest memories, the house(s) you grew up in, vivid memories of childhood, illnesses, the happiest and saddest memories of early childhood. Primary school days, including journey to school, teachers, classrooms, friends, activities and visits. Life outside school, what you had or didn't have inside and outside the house compared with today, meal times, entertainment, household chores, toys, styles of play, friends, interests. The seasonal variations to life, summer holidays.

#### **Brothers and sisters:**

Their names and positions in the family, activities you shared. What they did in later life. On a personal level, how well you got on together, co-operative or in conflict, how they may have influenced you.

#### **Family Life:**

The celebration of birthdays and festivals, special traditions, outings and holidays, family values, philosophies and sayings, the family car(s), pets, your family within the neighbourhood and local community.

#### **Aunts, uncles and cousins**

As above for grandparents plus their positions within the family tree. On a personal level, also, those with whom you had a special relationship. There may be other adults outside the family that could have a similar mention.

#### **Growing up:**

Secondary school days, including journey to school, teachers, classrooms, friends, activities and visits. What you did outside school, household chores, interests. Your social life as a teenager and the music, books, films, heroes and celebrities you may have been drawn to. Education and work in your late teens and early twenties and the associated upheaval. On a personal level, how you and those around you coped with growing up over these years.

**Working/parenting life:**

This may be best done in sections within a sequence of time and place, depending on the nature of employment. Each can include the choices you made, the work involved, responsibilities, pay, journey to work, hours worked, relationships with colleagues and those in authority, rewards and challenges, lessons learnt.

**Adult life outside work:**

Spouse(s)/partner(s) may follow a time sequence from first meetings, developing relationships, living together and (if relevant) separations including the activities, rewards and challenges faced together and (if relevant) on your own. Special events and experiences that were particularly memorable. On a personal level there is opportunity to reflect on attraction, ceremonies and how you and your partner(s) changed over the years. If there were children involved, there are the experiences of having the first and subsequent children and relating how they developed through childhood and adulthood. On the personal level, the joys and challenges of family life at various stages.

**Significant events and experiences:**

If not already covered; the choices and decisions, positive influences relating to people and experiences, difficult and stressful times, regrets and reflections in the light of your knowledge and experience gained more recently. Places visited. There is potential in reflection on how life has changed over the years including, inventions, technology and changes in society. There may have been incidents that caused life to take an unexpected turn. Bereavements provide a chance to reflect on the way that such losses were handled in the short and long term.

**Retirement**

How life has changed with retirement (the pluses and minuses), if the expectations before retirement were fulfilled or not, how you adapted to the changes in lifestyle that retirement brought. Maybe there is the opportunity to consider the role of a grandparent in the same way that parenting was considered earlier. In way ways are you still learning?

**The personal 'older and wiser' slot**

Life's journey involves a requirement to adapt to change and to gain skills and experiences that only those who have lived for many decades have the opportunity to gain. There were good decisions and regrets. There may be values and practices that are worth passing on to younger generations, especially in organising your priorities. There is a chance to refer to personal habits, vices and fears and to include a self-assessment of your personality both as you think you are and how others may see you, your strengths and flaws. There is a host of value systems, personal qualities, skills and talents for the self-indulgent.

**Your Passion**

There may be some aspect of your life that had been so important to you that it is worth a special section, tracing its development and what it has meant to you at various times in your life.