

Everyone Has a Story to Tell



Your Step-by-Step Guide

Compiled by Members of Lichfield u3a

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Preface

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)

Why write your 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.

Introduction: before you start...

Writing memoirs can be a bewildering and sometimes overwhelming task. This template has been designed to provide a detailed step-by-step guide to enable you to complete the task with ease.

Before you begin, it might be useful to:

- ❖ Gather materials together which may be of interest; letters, photographs, diaries, school reports and other documents.

- ❖ Interview significant people who have been involved in your life.

- ❖ Brainstorm ideas for your writing with family members and friends. Begin to write down your main memories in whatever order they come to you.

- ❖ 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.

- ❖ Avoid jargon and technical terms. Use simple direct language that gets your point across.

- ❖ Follow the basic advice of successful writers; 'show not tell.' Voltaire leaves behind a famous quote, 'The secret of being boring is to tell everything.' Don't fall into the rambling trap!



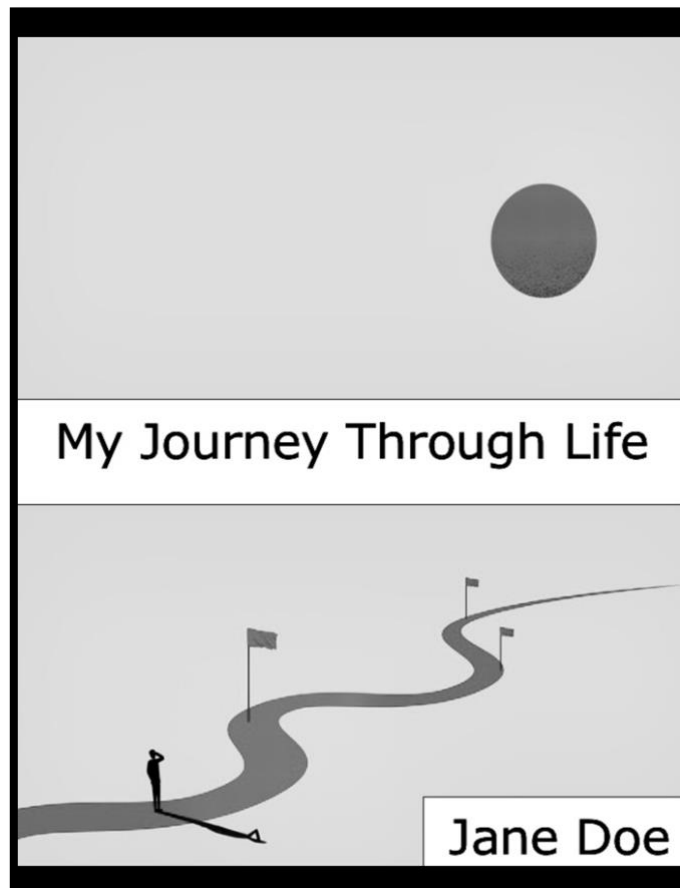
Step One: creating your title page

You will need to choose a title to represent your story. This is an important decision and can help create an immediate interest in your writing. However, you can make the choice at any time, even waiting until you have completed your story.

Here are some suggestions.

- ❖ Finding My Way
- ❖ Memories
- ❖ The Life and Times of Jane Doe
- ❖ My Story
- ❖ It's the Final Countdown
- ❖ My Journey Through Life
- ❖ The Unexpurgated Edition of My Life, Warts and All

You may want to embellish the title page with photographs or drawings. Don't be afraid to come up with a title that is unique and memorable but keep it short. Consider the general theme of your story and use words that reflects this.



Step Two: preparing an overall account of your life story

Step two follows the title page, and you'll begin your story by compiling a brief account of your life. We have designed 'timeline grids' for this purpose. The grids should be completed decade by decade, documenting your story from birth up to the present, recording personal information and your choice of world events which will give meaning to the time. Here is a blank timeline grid.

Year	Age	My Life		World Events
19				
19				
19				
19				
19				
19				
19				
19				
19				
19				

You may want to refer to the 'Table of Significant Events Over the Last 82 Years' before you start, available in Appendix C. This should help you decide which world events you'd like to include on your grid.

Next, you'll find on pages five, six and seven, examples of completed grids.

Jayne Jones completed 1950s timeline grid. She was born in 1954, so a 1950s decade timeline grid is Jayne's starting point.

Year	Age	My Life	World Events
1950		My parents, Derek Jones and Beryl Wood married on 3 July in Aston Parish Church.	BCG vaccines were introduced in Britain to fight TB.
1951		My parents moved into their new home at 33 Blackwood Road, Tamworth.	Festival of Britain.
1952		My brother Edward was born 4 August at home.	Queen Elizabeth II accedes to the throne after death of King George VI.
1953		The neighbours had a street party with food and fancy dress.	Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey,
1954		I was born 17 June Jayne Eliza Jones at home. Dad was promoted to office manager.	Roger Bannister beat 4 min mile. First successful kidney transplant.
1955	1	My Aunt Joan and Uncle Ron emigrated to Canada.	Anthony Eden succeeded Winston Churchill as PM. Polio vaccine approved.
1956	2	My sister Angela born 11 August in Tamworth Hospital.	Polio vaccine available in UK. Suez Crisis.
1957	3	Family holiday in a caravan North Wales, Barmouth. Got stung by a jellyfish.	Sir Anthony Eden resigned. Harold MacMillan became PM. Whooping cough vaccine introduced.
1958	4	Grandad Jones died 3 May. Grandma came to live with us.	Cod Wars between Iceland and UK. John XXIII is elected Pope.
1959	5	I started school at Blackwood Primary School. Mom made my uniform from Dad's old trousers. We got our dog, Samson, from the Dog's Home.	Luna 1 launched by Soviet Union. First section of M1 motorway open.

Now we'll follow examples of two decades, using Joshua Doe's life story. His birth was 1972, so a 1970s decade timeline grid was his starting point.

Joshua Doe 1970s

	Age	My Life	World Events
1970		My parents David Doe and Susan White met at a Valentine disco at the Park Avenue Nightclub in Sutton Coldfield.	First Glastonbury concert is held.
1971		Marriage of David and Susan Doe 29 th January at St Chad's Church Lichfield. The reception was held at the George Hotel in Lichfield.	Britain begins to use decimal currency.
1972		I was born in Good Hope Hospital on 24th June. I went home to my parents' council flat, 12, Sky Tower Lichfield.	11 Israeli athletes killed at Munich Olympics.
1973	1	My first family holiday in Blackpool June 1973. We stayed in a boarding house called Sea View; it was a long way from the beach.	UK joins European Economic Community.
1974	2	My family moved from their council flat into a house, 21 Sutton Rd Lichfield.	ABBA win Eurovision song contest with Waterloo.
1975	3	My brother Jack born 3 rd April. I stayed at my Auntie Pat's house until mum came home.	Margaret Thatcher becomes Conservative leader.
1976	4	I started school at Lichfield County Primary School. My teacher was called Mrs Richards.	Britain enjoys a summer long heatwave.
1977	5	We went to Scotland on the train for our holidays. We stayed in Pitlochry in a log cabin.	Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee
1978	6	My Dad took me to my first Villa Match. Villa beat Coventry 3-1. I've supported them ever since.	First test tube baby born.
1979	7	My Dad passed his driving test. He bought a red Ford Escort.	Cons win Election Margaret Thatcher is 1st female PM.

Joshua Doe 1980s

	Age	My Life	World Events
1980	8	My first cub camp at Beaudesert Camp site. I was very homesick the first night but enjoyed it by the end of the week.	John Lennon is killed in New York.
1981	9	I had my tonsils out at Derby Hospital. I stayed in for 5 days and had 2 weeks off school and lots of presents.	Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer.
1982	10	My Grandma Doe died and Grandpa stayed with us for about 6 months. He then moved into a smaller flat near to our house.	War in the Falkland Islands.
1983	11	I passed the 11 plus and went to Lichfield Grammar School. I was given a blue racing bike as a reward for passing.	Protests at Greenham Common due to cruise missiles,
1984	12	I went on school trip to France. We went by ferry and I was seasick> We stayed with families in Lyon and I still write to Pierre (by email now)	Virgin Atlantic makes inaugural flight.
1985	13	I got a paper round from the Mr Lea's Newsagents. I earned £2.50 a week	Live Aid concerts.
1986	14	I went to my first Rolling Stones Concert at the Odeon in Birmingham with my friends Steve Hall and David Bates. I still see Steve now	Space Shuttle Challenger disintegrates at launch.
1987	15	I met my first girlfriend Sally Jones at Charisma Youth Club.	Hurricane storm in UK.
1988	16	I took my GCSE's and passed all 7 of them. I chose to do Maths, Chemistry, Physics and Economics at A Level.	Lockerbie plane crash kills all on board.
1989	17	I started driving lessons with BSM and passed my test first time on 12 th December. My Christmas present that year was a blue Mini so I could drive to school in 1990.	Hillsborough 97 dead.

Joshua's remaining task is to complete timeline grids for the 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, and 2020s, ending on the year he completed his memoirs.

Step Three: delving deeper

Having completed **Step Two**, you'll move onto **Step Three** and make a choice from 30 clearly labelled pages which will enable you to present a deeper, personal insight into your story. Here, you can include real glimpses of everyday life, and include your feelings and emotions, giving readers a better chance of getting to know who you really are.

It will be necessary to consider the pages which are relevant for you. For example, most of us would want to complete the 'MY FAMILY' and 'SCHOOL DAYS' pages but if you hate gardening, you wouldn't choose 'GARDENING DAYS', or if you've never been interested in sport, you'd leave out 'THE ROLE OF SPORT IN MY LIFE' option. The next few pages in this Guide list all the titles so it might be helpful to make a note of those of interest to you.

However, there may be other areas you wish to cover not identified here, so there is a page with a blank title box at the top to provide the opportunity to record your own titles. 'MY COLLECTION OF PROGRAMMES' or 'MY WORLD TOUR' spring to mind as possible examples. You may add as many of these optional pages as you need to enhance your story.

In addition to writing your story, you may want to add photographs, personal drawings, additional illustrations, maps or snippets from documents to your pages.

The final page is entitled, 'Enduring Words'. If you're working on the computer, this page, before you type on it, could be printed off and handwritten to add a personal touch to your story, and then scanned back into the main body of your work. The 'Enduring Words' could be a brief but reflective statement about your life in general; things you might have left unsaid.

Next, you will find a list of pages from which to make your choices with hints about what you may wish to consider.

HOME LIFE

Your birth date and place/christening/parents/siblings/relations/what life was like.

PLACES WHERE I HAVE LIVED

House moves you have made and why?

SCHOOL DAYS

Schools you have attended/dates/particular memories/favourite teachers/friends and subjects/did you like school?

BEYOND SCHOOL

What you did after leaving school/job/apprenticeship/college/university. Was this an enjoyable time?

MY WORKING LIFE

What was your very first job? Describe your working history/challenges and rewards/when did you retire?

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Memorable boy/girlfriends. Did you marry/divorce/lose your partner?

MY FAMILY: THE NEXT GENERATION: CHILDREN /GRANDCHILDREN

Information about your children/grandchildren.

MY FAMILY: PREVIOUS GENERATIONS: PARENTS / GRANDPARENTS

Details regarding your two parents/four grandparents and eight great grandparents. Appendix A provides information on the availability of free online family tree templates, should you wish to complete one.

PETS IN MY LIFE

Your childhood pets/do you have any pets now/how important are animals and pets to you?

HEALTH THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

Has poor health had a long-term impact on your life/have you ever been in hospital/ suffer with allergies/ how do you try and stay healthy now/ exercise/diet?

THE ROLE OF SPORT IN MY LIFE

Has sport been an important element in your life/as a participant/ supporter/coach?

FRIENDSHIPS THROUGH THE YEARS

The role of friends in your life/any lifelong friendships/friendships in particular you remember?

MY DESERT ISLAND DISCS

What eight favourite musical recordings /favourite book/ luxury item would you take to your desert island?

GARDENING DAYS

Is gardening important / do you visit famous gardens/what are your favourite flowers/have you ever had an allotment?

MY WORLD OF MUSIC

Do you recall any of the first records you ever bought/who were your favourite performers in childhood/have you attended any concerts/do you enjoy musicals and/or classical music /do you play any instrument /what music do you enjoy now?

FAVOURITE BOOKS AND POEMS

Do you have a favourite book/ books of all time/who are your favourite authors/which poems have been of significance to you/do you have a particular favourite poem?

THE PLACE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN MY LIFE

How important is religion in your life/in what way is it important /does spirituality play any kind of role in your life?

FOOD THROUGH THE DECADES

Do you remember your favourite meals as a child/ what are your favourite meals now/in what ways have your diet and eating habits changed over the years?

HOLIDAYS AT HOME AND ABROAD

Where did you spend holidays as a child/ when did you first travel abroad/ what types of holidays have you enjoyed over the years/do you have a favourite holiday?

THE COVID PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT

What impact did the pandemic have on your life/did you experience an actual COVID 19 attack and how did it manifest itself/have you been vaccinated/experienced any long-term problems/how did you and your family cope with the lockdown period?

THE WORLD OF FASHION

Do you recall the way you were dressed as a child/what recollections of changing fashion can you remember/was fashion important to you/do you remember a particular outfit you loved/hated?

THE CREATIVE ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

What role did theatres/cinemas/ museums/art galleries/concerts play in your life/do you remember certain films/plays or exhibitions?

MEMORABLE PEOPLE WHO HAVE INSPIRED ME

Can you recall certain personalities who have inspired you/teachers/well known entertainers/sportsmen and women/famous individuals/members of your own family?

MY PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS

During the course of your life, can you remember times and situations which make you feel proud/your job/ appearance/health/family/achievements/skills/abilities?

CHANGES IN EVERYDAY LIVING IN THE UK OVER THE LAST 70 YEARS

Changes in diet, with availability of ready meals/introduction of many new foods/technology/mobile phones, TVs, computers, the internet and online shopping/washing machines/tumble dryers/fridges/freezers/new cleaning products and appliances/entertainment changes through streaming services, videos/CDs/video games and social media.

SIGNIFICANT WORLD EVENTS DURING MY LIFETIME

Please refer to Appendix C which you may find helpful.

TRANSPORT CHANGES THROUGH THE YEARS

The car now dominant mode of travel/air travel has grown significantly /trains faster and more efficient/impact on the environment has led to the development of electric cars and scooters/cycling has increased in popularity particularly in congested areas

And last, but not least, this blank sheet can be printed off as many times as you need to enable you to provide your own titles. There will probably be important aspects of your life you'd like to record not included in this list, so just write your own title into the blank title box at the top of the page

ENDURING WORDS

This is the page you may choose to print off as a blank sheet to write in your own handwriting to provide a personal touch: a final statement.

The Artist: Mary Shimmell Bailey

When you begin working on your selected pages, you'll understand how fortunate we've been to be able to call upon the services of Mary, a Lichfield u3a member. Her artistic contributions on every page you choose to complete has made each one very special, before you even write anything. Every detailed illustration tells a story!

We thought you might want to know more about this remarkable artist.

My name is Mary Shimmell Bailey. I have always enjoyed drawing and illustration. I was a student at Bath Academy of Art, Corsham, in the 1960s and then spent most of my working life with a wide variety of age groups and abilities. This project has been great fun to do and maybe these sketches will bring back some memories for you. I was born in 1943 so I have had plenty to work on!

Step Four: poems, an optional step

When you have completed **Stage Three**, the mission to write your story has been accomplished, and you could end it all there, but you may want to include **Stage Four** and choose a favourite poem or poems to write at the end of your memoirs. You could even compose one yourself.

Ian Coldicott, a member of Lichfield u3a Poetry Writing Group, wrote his own poem which he is happy to share with us. (July 2023)

Memoir

She was staying at a hostel for unmarried mothers and women in need
My life began with her determination to keep me as her own
And I'm grateful for the sacrifices she made as she strived to succeed
For in those days what she was doing was almost unknown

Then a childhood spent learning how to manage without others
Till she married and I had to start using a strange new name
Some years later I found I had new half sisters and brothers
And some things were different but many stayed the same

Finding my way through the corridors and classrooms at school
Discovering all about the world and what it takes to succeed
English and maths are important, don't try playing the fool
But Latin and German: should I have acquiesced and agreed?

With 'O' and 'A' levels passed successfully, university beckoned
Getting my first girlfriend, we were snogging in the back of the bus
Youth Hostelling in Wales was well worth the effort, I reckoned
Late nights daubing slogans on doors in Rag Week was so like us

Entering the brave new world of work, responsibility, jackets and ties
Marriage, the in-laws, house buying, settling down, breaking up
Trying to make sense of it all, trying to see through all the lies
Starting and ending relationships, finding time to kiss and make up

Feeling overjoyed to be at the birth of your first daughter
Flying to Amsterdam, full of expectation, first time on a plane
Wanting new experiences, becoming an Arsenal supporter
And then renting that holiday apartment on the coast of Spain

Your children settle down and get married, grandchildren arrive
You review your achievements, look askance at your bucket list
And you decide just to celebrate the simple joys of being alive
Those things you haven't done yet you won't really have missed

Learning a new language, that school reunion, meeting old friends
Find time to write that first novel, or at least make a start
Going back to where you grew up, the journey never ends
For what goes around comes around, and people grow apart

Spend time in the garden, write poetry, join a protest march
Ride a motorbike, learn to fly a plane, walk the Pennine Way
Grow old disgracefully, but try not to be too harsh
On those people you know who have nothing much to say

Look back on how a life's meaning takes shape over time
As you try to piece all of it together in your mind
You know you can't do everything you did in your prime
But after all, at the end, peace of mind can be yours to find.

Helpful hints

These suggestions for printing, presenting, storing and writing, your completed life story might be useful.

Printing

When you are ready to print the final copy of your story, you will want it to look professional, so consider the following:

- ❖ Choose the font style and sizes you prefer but keep it consistent throughout.
- ❖ This guide and template use Verdana font.
Titles are size 16 or 14 and bold, text is size 14 or 12.
- ❖ Good quality paper will enhance your final version
- ❖ Paper weight is measured in GSM – grams per square metre. The higher the GSM, the thicker the paper
80 GSM is standard issue office printer paper, but 100 - 170 GSM are thicker papers, which will look better and last longer.
- ❖ Paper types include matte, glossy or photo paper, bright white or a range of colours and textures.
- ❖ If you have included digital photos you may find that photo paper produces better results.
- ❖ Thicker paper can be printed on both sides, thus reducing costs.
- ❖ Ensure that the paper is compatible with your printer.
Inkjet printers are widely used, but laser printers may need laser printer paper.

Don't forget to check your ink levels before you start!

If you don't have a printer, printing services are available at local libraries, or at print shops – either a local shop or online (Google search will list local services)

Presenting

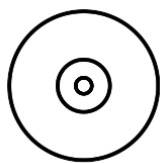
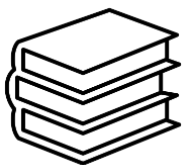
- ❖ A loose-leaf folder with plastic pockets gives flexibility. You can add, remove, amend and re-order your pages and also include items such as tickets, programmes, certificates and other memorabilia.
- ❖ Professional binding is also an option when you are happy you have no more amendments to make. A local bookbinder will advise on options and prices.
- ❖ An online Google search 'bookbinding services' will show the many options available.

Storing

Having presented your story, you will certainly need to create a backup in case your carefully crafted work is damaged, lost or destroyed.

There are several options, including

- ❖ Additional printed copies.
- ❖ CD, memory stick, external disc drive.
- ❖ Computer file – the template uses MSWord.
- ❖ Cloud storage
- ❖ Files can be saved as a .pdf file, which gives other options, for example, the story could be presented as a digital book.



Writing Tips

And finally, just in case your confidence in your writing skills is on the wane, here are a few writing tips which we, the writers of this Guide, found useful.

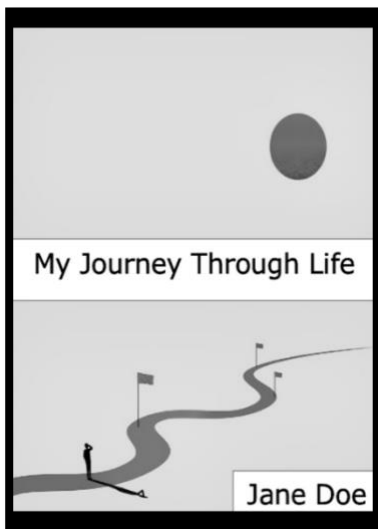
- ❖ Organise your thoughts before you start.
- ❖ Choose your words carefully.
- ❖ Proofread your work for errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- ❖ Don't over-explain; keep your language simple and direct.
- ❖ Check your work by reading it out loud.
- ❖ Let your personality shine through your writing and occasionally introduce phrases and slang you'd normally use.
- ❖ If you can write a sentence using fewer words, do so.
- ❖ Ask those you can trust for feedback.
- ❖ Don't take offence if you receive negative feedback but consider it. You can always leave things as they are.
- ❖ Don't use clichés.
- ❖ Make use of your Thesaurus to help you use a variety of words'
- ❖ Avoid repetition of the same word
- ❖ If you need help with grammar or spelling, reach out to Google for help.

So...it's time to begin: the checklist

Hopefully, you've read through this Step-by-Step Guide by now and checked the Appendices. Next, choose the option of how you're going to record your story, either by using a hard (printed) copy, or opting for the online version.

Whatever you decide, just follow the steps to help you along the way. Here's a reminder!

Step One The title page comes first.



Make a decision about what label you want to attach to your story, although you could amend this decision later.

Step Two This is where you record a brief overview of your life using the blank timeline grids one for each decade, starting with your birth decade and ending with the current decade. Use as many as you need. This will depend on your age! You'll have seen the completed examples in this Guide.

Year	Age	My Life		World Events
19				
19				

Year	Age	My Life		World Events
20				
20				

Step Three Here you'll find the 30 labelled pages from which to make your selection when writing personal details of your life. Choose the relevant pages and you may use more than one page for certain titles. Don't forget you may choose additional labels to add to your story.

And that's it! When all your selected pages have been documented, your precious memories are complete, and a valuable legacy is now available to family and friends.

Congratulations!

But don't forget you might want to carry on to...

Step Four This is definitely an optional step, and not for everyone, but when you have finished your memoirs you might want to include a much-loved poem or poems, or even compose your own.

The Appendices also offers information about accessing a blank family tree template should you need one, in Appendix A. We three writers of this Step-by Step Guide have already decided on our chosen poems for Step Four and included them in Appendix B, just to give you the idea. The comprehensive 'Table of Events Over the Last 82 Years' occupies Appendix C, which provides so many useful reminders of the times you have lived through.

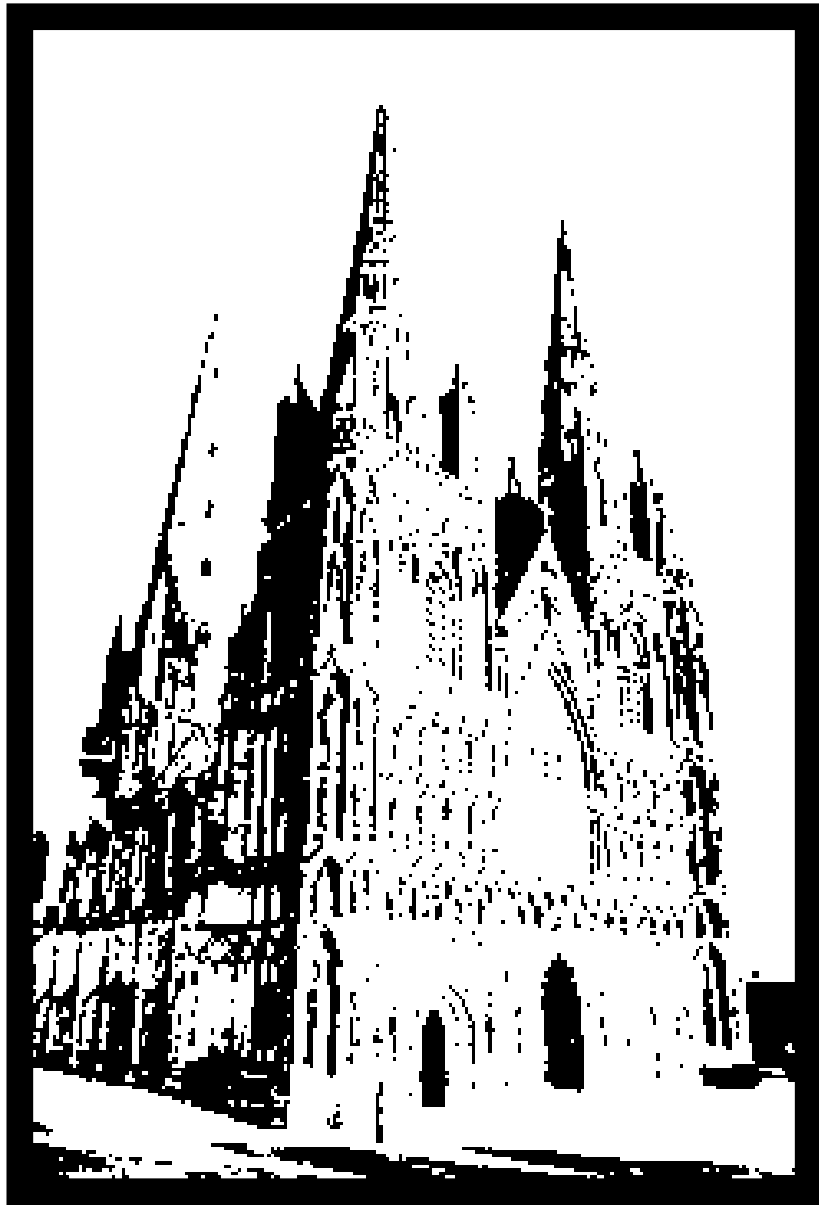
And that's it!

But above all, enjoy writing your story.

You're leaving behind a precious gift which may be read and enjoyed by many future generations, and your brain will certainly benefit from all your efforts.

And finally, we'd just like to say, our hope is that those who undertake to write their story using our template enjoy the activity. We wish you the best of luck with your endeavours and would love to think our template has helped you along the way.

Veronica Birkett Pauline Huckfield Pauline Williams



Lichfield Cathedral

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Produced by members of Lichfield u3a
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