

WRITING LIFE STORIES

- with LYNDA TAIT on Tuesdays from 12 noon – 2 p.m. at Kingscliff Library (Activities Room)

Autobiographies begin the day you were born (or close to it) and continue up to the present. Memoirs cover a chronological period in your life, like your teen years, or a subject, like all the jobs you've held.

LIFE STORIES are more like little true tales (although some can run for many pages).

Life stories are among the most significant legacies we can leave to our children and grandchildren. How many of you have wished your deceased relatives had written down the events and circumstances of their lives. In my case - what made them relocate with their young family across the ocean removing them from a loving extended family and life in a Lancashire council house to the company of strangers in migrant hostel in southern Africa?

At “**Writing Life Stories**” we are writing what is primarily our story, about our life, our experiences, our feelings and attitudes, written in our own style. Be flexible with the format. Allow yourself the liberty to express yourself in a manner most comfortable for you. Recording your life story doesn't mean you have to write an autobiography.

In this group we will not teach you how to write your Life Story. There is no teacher as such – just a courteous, friendly, sociable group of folk with a common goal in mind - recording their life stories. Listening to the stories of our other writers will often trigger your own memory. You will discover that attendance at this class is the stimulus that's needed to sit down and write your homework assignment. Yes – there is homework and your Life Stories will be written at home and read aloud at the next class.

A typical homework topic might be “DANCING” and a few prompts might be given: i.e. *How old were you when you learned to dance? Was dancing a regular activity? Who did you dance with and where? What type of dancing did you do? With whom? Did you have lessons - tap, ballet, ballroom?*

It is a good idea to create a timeline or life history calendar so that you don't leave portions of your life out unintentionally. As a memory aid list down one side of a page the years since your birth and against each date write significant events that occurred in that year. For example – 1940: born at Granny's house; 1949 – migrated; 1956 – left school; etc, etc. In class, we won't be writing in chronological order, but at a later date your articles can be slotted into sequence.

Be as specific as possible about dates, names, ages and places but try not to let memory lapses frustrate you. Young or old we all have trouble remembering sometimes. It's okay to leave blanks to fill in later or even skip to the experiences, events or times of your life you remember the most. If you can't remember precisely where and when an event occurred, you might at least recall it was sometime in the early 1970s, somewhere between 8 and 10 years old, and it was either spring or summer. These details will help to make your story vivid. Include your senses! As you recall a life experience or event, consider including details about the way things looked, smelled, tasted, sounded, and felt. This will add colour to your story. When writing, think outside the square. Don't use 50 words when 40 will tell a punchier and interesting story. Sometimes, too much detail can be boring to a reader/listener. Any subject can be used to illustrate an event or time in your life.

As a general rule, the format of the class is:

- Homework is read aloud. One or two photos or other mementos may be brought along. As you are reading your work, remember anything that is said as an aside or explanation should be written in the piece. These are often what make a story more interesting.

- In order to allow all stories to be read each week readings are restricted to fewer than 1000 words. After a reading, the writer might ask for feedback. You will receive encouragement, but you will not have your writing criticised or grammar corrected (unless you ask). Instead it might be suggested that an aspect of the story was not clearly understood and further information may be needed. When giving feedback, be respectful and kind. It is not our place to censor or show our disapproval of the opinions of others. **It would be appreciated if discussion could be kept short and include the whole class. Chats between 2 or 3 members can be disruptive.**
- Homework topic is discussed and set.
- A short exercise will be undertaken prior to the closure of each class.

SOME TOPICS WE WILL COVER:

BIRTH STORY: Where, when, who was there. Siblings at the time.

HOME LIFE: Where did you grow up? What kind of town was it? What was your house like? Did it differ from the homes of your friends? What positive memories do you have of your environment?

EDUCATION: How far back can you remember in your schooling? Can you recall the first teacher you had? Were you good at sports? What was your favourite subject?

FAMILY: What kind of family did you have? How you saw them as a child. How you see them now. Did you feel loved? What were the rules? Were your parents strict?

CHILDHOOD RELATIONSHIPS: What do you remember about your feelings about your brothers and sisters? Did you have a special friend?

TALENTS AND HOBBIES: What kind of talent did you have as a child? Did you take any lessons? Did your early talent have any bearing on your career? What hobbies and interests do you have now?

MONEY: What it scarce or plentiful? Are you careful with money? A spender or a saver?

OCCUPATION: What were your career choices? Did you enjoy your job? Did lasting friendships arise from employment?

SCHOOL DAYS: Where, when. Uniforms. Favourite subjects. School facilities. School friends. Transport to/from school. Teachers.

... TRAINING, TRAVEL, REGRETS, LOSS, CHILDREN, SPOUSE, SIBLINGS, NEIGHBOURS, TRANSPORT, MARRIAGE, HOLIDAYS, PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS ETC.