



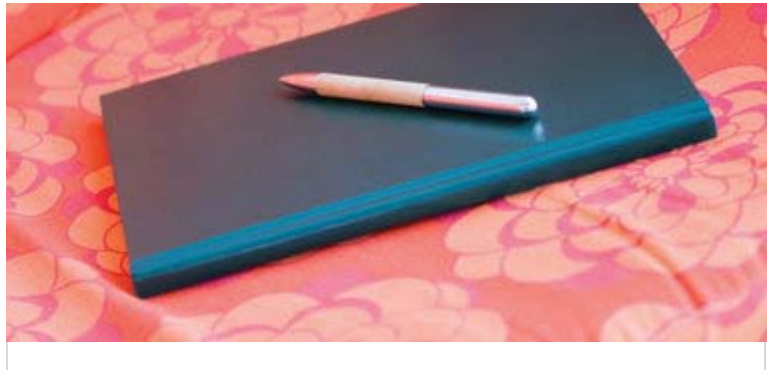
There are many options for seniors who want to preserve family history by writing their memoirs

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BE By Booth Features

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Creators.com

For a rapidly growing segment of seniors, the legacy they most want to leave their children and grandchildren has nothing to do with a family heirloom, a bank account or a piece of real estate.



It's in the form of memoirs, stories of their lives captured between the pages of leather-bound books, on CDs, stored and printed from computers or carefully handwritten in collections of notebooks.

"We're not drying dishes and telling stories around the sink much anymore," said Beth Sanders, who created an online company, **LifeBio.com**, to help others write their memoirs. "People are more separated from their family members, so if they don't write down their memories, they really will be lost or forgotten."

Sanders — whose website, for a fee, provides individuals and families with a variety of memoir-writing guides and templates, classes, hardcover books and even individual hourlong phone interviews — suggests starting with an outline by decade, including the people who shaped you, such as parents and other relatives, your childhood memories, historical events that affected your life, important milestones and relationships in your adulthood — including jobs, love, marriage, children and grandchildren — and beliefs and values.

Wisdom to be shared

"Memoir writing is a great choice for seniors because elder wisdom needs to be shared," said psychotherapist and author Dorothea Hover-Kramer. "With all the electronic communications and media most young people are exposed to, there is little room for passing on the insights of previous generations."

You don't have to be a great writer to write your memoirs, most experts say.

"Anyone can write memoirs. You might need to adapt your memoirs to your circumstances and experiment with what works for you. Hand writing works for some; tape recording works for others. And you can also have a family member interview you and write down your answers. Some people compose directly on the computer," said Ann E. Green, associate professor of English and graduate director of writing studies at St. Joseph's University.

Finding a writing group or a trusted friend to read your drafts and discuss your work is a good first step. We think of writers working alone, but many writers have writing groups, Green said. Many local libraries have workshops on memoir writing, which would be an excellent place to get started. If your local college lets you audit courses, taking a memoir writing or creative nonfiction course is often a great starter as well, she said.

"Persistence is important," said Towson University English professor and author Diane Scharper, a member of the **National Book Critics Circle** who compiled an anthology of memoirs, "Reading Lips and Other Ways to Overcome a Disability," for the **Helen Keller Foundation**. "You need to write until you're happy with the results."

The bad with the good

Putting bad memories in with the good can be tricky, Green warned.

"Your job as the writer is to get it as close to your truth as you can and to treat other people in your story with compassion," she said. "Especially in the first draft, you need to write a lot and in as much detail as possible. Later you can decide what to revise and what to keep in your story."

"Memoir writing often brings up emotions with memories. It's important to acknowledge the emotions and to know that you might be surprised by what you feel about an event long in the past."

For seniors who might have difficulty creating memoirs on their own, there's **ColorPad**, conceived by Linda Mastaglio, an entrepreneur who came up with the idea of a series of inexpensive coloring books for seniors with images designed to rekindle memories of life in the 1950s, '60s or '70s. A "Life in the '40s" edition is also contemplated, she said.

Each 24-page coloring book provides a place to write in special memories, such as recalling a first date or favorite song. Copies are available online at www.TWIpublishing.com.

Other memoir writing resources suggested by the pros include a do-it-yourself family interviewing guide available online from StoryCorps — at **StoryCorps.org** — and books that offer tips on writing and developing memoirs, such as "Writing Life Stories" by Bill Roorbach, Anne Lamott's "Bird by Bird" and Natalie Goldberg's "Writing Down the Bones."

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