

Why Should You Tell Your Story?

Philip Sherwood, *lifewriters.ca*

A personal history, or life story, is an account of someone's life, as told by him or her in a permanent record. It may be a complete autobiography or just a "slice" of life — a memoir. Personal histories are above all stories — full of the emotions, feelings, descriptions, memories, and thoughts that lie behind the facts of a life.

So, why tell your story?

People do it for many reasons. Some simply derive great pleasure and satisfaction from recalling meaningful events and celebrating their lives. For them it's easy — they enjoy the process!

Others see it as an opportunity for personal growth, a chance to reflect and make sense of their lives. They're seeking perspective, significance, and insight into themselves and the influences that have shaped them.

Many storytellers want to be more than a mere twig on a family tree. Perhaps life has cast them in a certain role — an aunt, professional, or parent — where their dreams, goals, successes, and fears have been largely ignored. By telling their stories, they hope to be remembered as real, multi-dimensional people — as individuals.

Others tell their story to ensure that they have a say in how they are remembered. As

someone has said, if you don't tell your story, someone else will. They want to tell their story their way — to expound on their personal or political passions and make sure that certain things are not forgotten.

Some storytellers want to tell their story but find it too difficult to share intimate and sometimes painful memories, ideas, and emotions face to face with their loved ones. Having their story written sets them free to be more honest.

Some others see it as a way of identifying and dealing with difficult and sometimes painful events from their past. They are mindful of the adage that while we may try to forget the past, the past does not always forget us. By airing some issues, storytellers hope to break harmful cycles of behaviour.

And then for many, there is the almost primal need to leave a legacy — to pass on to the next generation in an enduring format the

traditions, stories, and lessons that they have learned. They understand that children or grandchildren will never regret reading the life story of their parents or grandparents. Some see their life story as being the most valuable legacy they can leave their families, a kind of priceless heirloom that heals and strengthens family relationships, provides continuity, and helps them appreciate their heritage.

Whatever the reason, people who commit their stories to paper almost inevitably report that the experience changes them. They describe it as being "empowering, deeply rewarding, satisfying, therapeutic, transformational, meaningful, healing, and insightful." It enables many to live a more purposeful, enriching life. They also talk of how much fun the process is, and how they enjoy the attention and praise they get from those who read their stories!

There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is an impossibility. Inside the dullest exterior there is a drama, a comedy, and a tragedy. — Mark Twain