

## Six Tips for Memoir Writers, by Karen DUSTMAN\*



We all have wonderful stories to tell! But memoir-writing can open up parts of yourself that you've long kept sealed. No wonder it's so easy to put off!

If you have a memoir inside that's struggling to get written, here are six tips to help get your life story down on paper:

- 1. Start with the easy stuff.** What could be easier? Jot down the basics: birth date and birth place; names of parents, grandparents, siblings. You might find stories popping up as you do this — if so, great! Make a list of those stories, and keep writing!
- 2. Think happy.** Who was your best friend in grade school? What were your favorite foods as a kid, and who prepared them? What music did you love? Happy memories are usually a great way to get flowing!
- 3. Go big-picture.** Step back for a second and think about world events that affected your life. Have you lived through wars, recessions, gas shortages? Did you watch the first man touch the moon, or the Twin Towers fall? What big-picture events happened in your lifetime, and how were you swept up in them?
- 4. Remember decision-points.** Everyone reaches a fork in the road at some time in his or her life. What tough decisions did you have to make, and how did you make them? (These stories can be some of the most fascinating parts of a memoir!)
- 5. Go ahead, jump around.** One of the biggest traps for memoir writers is the (totally understandable) effort to write chronologically. But memory doesn't work that way. Go ahead, let your imagination jump around! Write whatever memory comes into your head and says "write me." You can always sort your stories into better order later. That's what word-processing (or a three-ring binder) is for!
- 6. Welcome writers' block.** Yes, I really said that. Writers' block happens to us all, and it's one of the biggest gifts in our toolbox. When something is really, truly important but you haven't quite processed it yet, your subconscious won't let it out onto paper. Realize when you've hit one of those "big ones." Be gentle, but keep coming back to it. Often if you can figure out exactly what the hang-up is (fear of failure? not knowing how to do something?), that fresh insight alone will re-open the writing door.



*We all have great stories to tell . . .*



*A book grows by chapters.  
But you don't have to write  
them in order.*



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