

focus on writing...

by patricia charpentier



i remember...

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ALSO BY PATRICIA CHARPENTIER

*EATING AN ELEPHANT: WRITE YOUR LIFE
ONE BITE AT A TIME*

BRINGING YOUR ANCESTORS TO LIFE

FIVE-YEAR JOURNAL



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION

On the first Saturday of every month, I lead a writing workshop designed to help the participants remember moments in their lives which they may not otherwise think to write about. I often hear people say, “I don’t remember what happened when I was a child. How can I write my life story?” Those memories are simply stored somewhere in the mind. They just need to be coaxed out into the open, and this book helps you accomplish that.

Most of the memory triggers in this booklet focus on daily life, not the big occasions. You likely remember the weddings, births, deaths, illnesses, successes, etc., but without something external to spark your memory, the little details are usually left out of life stories.

I use the word *prompt* to describe each of these memory triggers, but what is a prompt anyway? The dictionary describes it as “something serving to suggest or remind.” That’s exactly what these prompts are designed to do: suggest and remind you of people, places, times, mementoes and so forth that you might not have thought about in years.

This booklet is your personal writing workshop. You do not have to do the prompts in the order they are written; pick and choose as you like depending upon your interests that day. You can also reuse the same prompts because on different days, they trigger different memories.

These are *timed* exercises. Don't groan; this isn't a test. You can't possibly fail. You are writing a story that only you can tell. Get the kitchen timer or a stop watch, your phone alarm, whatever device you wish to use and set it for ten (10) minutes. Read the prompt slowly and then start writing. Don't ponder the question or try to read more into it than there is. Let go and write what comes to mind. You may be surprised at what you remember.

You won't finish writing a response to any prompt in ten minutes. These are designed to get you started and unearth memories for your subsequent, more extension writing sessions. If you don't even get to the heart of the story you want to tell, don't worry. This just means you'll have something to work on later.

What if one of these prompts lights a fire, and you want to keep writing after the bell rings? By all means, go ahead. My class motto is: "The only way to do this wrong is to *not* do it at all," so use the contents of this booklet in whatever way works for you. You simply cannot do this wrong.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

Most people come to the writing workshop every month because it provides them with new material to write about. It is my hope that this booklet will do the same for you. Here are comments from regular workshop participants in their own words:

These workshops allow for blasting through writer's block, life distraction, stress and procrastination. I am rewarded with fresh ideas, topics, memories and often a new source for additional ideas when classmates share their experiences. Encouragement is plentiful and gratifying. Lots of laughter and occasional tears from memories and shared ideas.

Pat Guttery



I enjoy the fellowship with this wonderful group of people. We come from different backgrounds but we are here with a common interest and that is writing. Many of my stories have stemmed from exercises in these workshops. The workshops are a wonderful thing for me, and I have already paid for the entire year of 2011. I do not want to miss a thing. I learn something about my writing every time I attend.

Loyd G. Gilley

I feel the workshop prompts spark an inner awakening. Things long forgotten come to life again. If there hasn't been a resolution, a second chance presents itself for closure. If pleasant memories surface, I can again enjoy what was originally experienced. After a typical workshop, I review my writings and earmark those I feel have potential for further development.

I have had six or seven beautiful stories to share in the published class booklet. My advice for every writer is to keep a notebook handy for the workshops. It keeps the prompts and the initial thinking in a safe place so that I don't have to run after errant pieces of paper. Use the prompts to trigger your own life experiences. People share commonalities such as emotions and lessons learned.

Norma Beasley



I have enjoyed the Saturday Writing Workshops so much. Some topics brought joy and some heartache. I think the first Saturday I attended we wrote about "Your Secret Hiding Place as a Child." That was moving for me as I hid out in our corn crib to get away from my family. "Things I Can Do Well" was helpful, "Failures" hit home and was painful.

"Favorite Toys" was cool, and "Short and Long Term Goals" helped a lot. "My Second Family" brought back memories of a beloved couple in the area.

Barbara Robertson



At my first Writing Your Life workshop, Patricia asked us to write about an emotional memory. After giving it a little thought, I wrote about an automobile accident that destroyed our trailer home. That one event stimulated a host of additional memories, giving an expanded depth to my writing. That one session removed the roadblock to "getting started."

Barbara Rawls



If you live close to a writing workshop, please join in and see what awaits you there. And if you are ever in the Orlando area on the first Saturday of the month, please look us up. If that's not possible, using this booklet is the next best thing.

The prompts on the following pages represent the best of those presented in 2010, ones that many class members used to write compelling stories.

Okay, are you ready? Got the timer set to ten (10) minutes?

1 THE MOST FUN I EVER HAD

Write about times you spent with a grandparent or someone else you looked to as a grandparent, e.g., your aunt, uncle, family friend, etc. What did you do with this person? What made being with him/her so much fun? Do you remember one time in particular? What was this person like? How often did you get to spend time with him/her?

2 MY FAVORITE DAY

As a child, what was your favorite day of the week? Why was this your favorite day? What did you do on this day? What made it different from the other days of the week? With whom did you typically spend this day? Did your favorite day of the week change over time? If so, why did it change?

3 I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER THE DAY

Think about your elementary school days and try to remember a particular day, an event or occasion that sticks in your memory. Describe that time in detail. What happened? What makes this time so vivid in your mind? Why have you remembered it all these years? Is this a positive or negative memory?



4 MY CHILDHOOD BEDROOM

Visualize your childhood bedroom. If you've had more than one bedroom, pick the one that is most vivid in your memory. Mentally put yourself right back in the center of the room. What did the room look like? How did you feel being in this room? What was this bedroom to you? Was it just a place to sleep or did it serve another purpose? What was in the room? Be specific. Did you share it with anyone? What did you see outside the window? Description at its best focuses on all the senses, not just sight. In addition to what you can see, what did you smell? What did objects in your bedroom feel like? What sounds could you hear in this room?

5 WHAT A CHARACTER

Who was a character in your hometown? Define *character* as you wish—someone funny, peculiar, eccentric, odd, etc. Why did you consider this person a character? What did he or she do that made him/her stand out to you? How did you know this person? What was your relationship with him/her? Do you remember any specific interactions with this person? What did other people in your town think of this person? Did other people help form your opinion of him/her as a character? If so, who was that, and how did they influence you in this way?



6 MY GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

What was one of your greatest childhood accomplishments? How did this success come about? What did you do to achieve this feat? What did it mean to you? Did you get a prize for your success? If so, what was your award?

7 MY OWN MONEY

What is something you bought with your own money as a child? Describe what you bought in detail. Why did you want this item? Where did you go to get this object? How did you get the money to buy it? What did you do with what you bought after you got it? Were you glad you spent your money on this or did you wish you had not bought it?

8 THESE FIVE THINGS

If you had just enough time to grab five things you did not want to lose in the flood or tornado heading your way, what would you take with you? Assume that your family and pets are safe. Why would you choose the things you did? Describe the items in detail. What is the significance of these items? What would you do without these objects?

9 FINISH THE STORY

Once upon a time...

So what do you think? Did these prompts trigger memories for you? I bet they did.

The complete *I Remember* booklet contains *fifty* sets of questions designed to help you recall memories you might not otherwise think to write about.

Ponder that for a moment...if you pick one prompt each week and write the story behind it, you'll have a book of life stories ready to be printed within a year!

Follow the link to order your [downloadable .pdf version of *I Remember*](#) and start writing. Cost for the booklet of prompts is \$4.99, including tax.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WHEN I WAS IN MY TWENTIES, my mother handed me a copy of our family tree that dated back to 1648 when my ancestors came from France to settle in an area known as *Acadie*, now Nova Scotia. “That’s nice,” I replied and put the papers away in a drawer.



In a move some twenty years later, I came across the yellowed sheets held together by a rusty staple. Looking at the names and tracing the path down to my own name, I now longed to know more about the people whose births, marriages and deaths were listed before me. Unfortunately, by that time, all those who held pieces of our family story were long gone. I missed my opportunity. My ancestors’ stories died with them.

Since then I’ve devoted a great deal of time to helping others avoid the mistake I made, assisting them in preserving their stories for themselves and their families. Through ghostwriting memoirs on behalf of others as well as teaching and editing, I have assisted hundreds of people in creating a written legacy for generations to come.

I am the author of the multi-award winning book, [*Eating an Elephant: Write Your Life One Bite at a Time*](#), and I can be reached by email at patricia@writingyourlife.org, by phone at 321-279-1791, or by mail at P.O. Box 541527, Orlando, FL 32854. For more information on the Writing Your Life program, check out my web site at www.writingyourlife.org.

i remember...

I Remember... helps unearth memories long forgotten by the reader. Patricia Charpentier shares fifty of the most popular prompts from her monthly writing workshops and encourages the reader to revisit favorite childhood places, memorable days, special people, sounds of the morning, etc. Use this booklet as your personal workshop and begin writing your life story today.