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Chapter 1 - Getting Started

Introduction

An autobiography is about sharing: sharing your experiences, sharing your thoughts, opinions, feelings and emotions and sharing lessons from the past. Your memories are important and certainly worth writing down, but they will only be of lasting value if you write them in such a way that you encourage other people to read them. This book has been written for anyone who feels they have a story to tell but who needs help remembering the details, writing in an engaging fashion or organising and structuring their material. Who knows: if you produce a well written body of work, it may even motivate other people to follow your example and write about their own lives as well.

Having decided to take the plunge and start putting your life down on paper, it can be quite a daunting prospect. If you were in your 20s and had a good memory, you would have 20 x 365 days worth of material to work with. So where does that leave anyone who is well over 50?

Fortunately, an autobiography can only be a snapshot of the most interesting, unusual or important parts of your life. This book will help you decide what to include and help you achieve your aims by looking at your reasons for writing, your likely audience and what you can do to make the whole process manageable and enjoyable.

Remembering

One reason people give for not writing their autobiography is that they feel their memory isn't good enough. Memories are so elusive; you may have already decided that most of the important details of your past life are lost forever in the mists of time. I am glad to tell you that there are techniques available to overcome this problem if it is your main concern. I will introduce you to a wide range of different approaches that will help jog your memory, and you should end up with more than enough material to work on.

Research

A later chapter looks at various methods for carrying out research, but it is worth noting here that it would be sad if you saw autobiography in terms of simply a description of events interspersed with facts and figures. Together with the facts themselves, it is your chance to convey your feelings, views, opinions and emotions as events unfolded, as well as how these have changed over time. Your readers will often be far more excited by the personality of the writer and how life has affected them than by any dates and times.

On the other hand, inaccuracies and incorrect information can be annoying and misleading. So you will learn where you can go to check up on details if these will improve and inform your writing.

Activities

Throughout each chapter, you will be asked to carry out a number of activities. To get the most out of this book and ultimately achieve your goal, it is important that you complete them at the appropriate time. They are there to build on the ideas presented earlier and will

help you clarify your thoughts as well as practise the skills required to produce good quality autobiographical writing.

Book structure

This book will:

- Help you identify your real reasons for writing an autobiography
- Introduce a wide variety of techniques that you can use in order to remember details from your past
- Help you start writing your memories down
- Demonstrate methods for improving your writing so that it comes to life
- Guide you through the various sources of further information
- Suggest different methods for structuring your finished work
- Point out the pitfalls when it comes to editing your material
- Identify ways to publish all or parts of your life story

Each chapter follows a similar pattern:

- An introduction to the main themes and ideas for tackling them in your own work
- Activities for you to carry out that will get you remembering and writing
- One piece of work to complete at the end of the chapter where you can apply the various skills or ideas that have been introduced.