

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GUIDE FOR A PERSONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

#### Childhood Through Adolescents

Writing an autobiography, an account of life's experience to date, accomplishes several things. One accomplishment is that it gives the writer a detailed account of every event that has significantly contributed to his life. It also makes him aware of certain behavior patterns that may be contributing to his recurring problems. In addition, it helps him to develop new ways of living and coping that will allow him to make better choices in the future. It can also be used as a tool to encourage memories and feelings that have been repressed or ignored up to now, and that cause distress in many areas of life. As you write your life's story, you will uncover lots of lost memories. You might be surprised at how many pleasant ones you uncover, too.

The following questions are to guide your memories. Be as detailed as you can, as the more the detail the deeper the memories. Try to note patterns in yourself and in other family members.

It is important to keep in mind the purpose of a written autobiography otherwise the task may frighten or overwhelm you. The process of writing is not just to put information down on paper. It is to help you better understand your past and ultimately your present, allowing you to change your future - from what it might have been to what you want it to be.

#### **DIRECTIONS:**

An autobiography is a Work In Progress (WOP). If you have a computer or word processor available to use, begin by typing out the answers the following questions. This way you can add more to your story as you remember new things. Eventually you may want to reformat your story into a personal novel and give copies to your family and friends as gifts. This way they can remember you and help you celebrate your new life.

Please complete the following questions. After reading the question, write down what comes to your mind immediately. Do this with all of the questions. After completing the entire exercise, re-read the questions and your answers and "think" about them. Additional memories will probably emerge. Write them down also.

## Earliest Memories

How did you get your first and middle name; were you named after someone special?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who named you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Why were you given that particular name?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What is your earliest memory; how old were you; who was there with you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Do you remember a feeling that goes with the memory?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What was it like to be a small child in your home?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who were the people who cared for you; were around you; spent time with you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were they like; was there someone in your life that was special to you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who cared the most about you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you spend your time; alone, with siblings, with adults, with other children, with strangers?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you spend your time when you were with other people; when you were alone?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your mother/father treat you; how did you feel?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What did your mother/father expect of you; did you live up to their expectations?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did family members show affection; when did they stop or change? Be specific.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How were you disciplined; by whom?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How were you rewarded; by whom?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you feel about yourself?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Why did you feel that way?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you relate to your siblings?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Grade School**

What did your grade school building look like?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you feel in that school building and class room; did you like your teacher; did you like the other students; did they like you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What kind of clothes did you wear; did you feel out of place; did other children tease you; did you fight back?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did you play on a playground; where else did you play; did other children play with you; did you feel left out; were you chosen first on the team?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who played with you; did you play with girls; boys; did you fit well in your group; did you play well with others?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What did you do when you played; what kinds of games did you play; did you win; loose; quit the game?

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were the other children doing at this time; playing without you; playing something else; teasing you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Where did you sit in the classroom; in the front; in the back; by the teacher; by your friend?

---

---

---

---

---

---

What did the classroom look like; what kind of chairs or desks; were there windows; where did you hang your coat; where did you eat lunch?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you feel when you were in the classroom; safe; closed in; anxious; afraid; ready to learn, stupid; accepted?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did the teachers spend time with you; helping you; scolding you; teaching you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

What was school like for you? What was good; what was bad; what was fun?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How would your teachers have described you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How would your classmates have described you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your successes?

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your failures?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you spend your free time; alone; with friends; with siblings; reading; homework; playing?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did you or any of your family members have any physical health problems; mental health problems; alcohol or drug problems; accidents, prison terms; long periods away from home?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Describe any changes in your family patterns: moving, deaths, divorces, foster care, adoptions, living with relatives, not allowed to see relatives, live in or step parents, etc.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your parents get along; did you live with one parent; which parent?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your parents settle differences; step parents?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your parents handle stress; stepparents?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What was your family's religious practice; did you like or dislike participating?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How many brothers and sisters did you have; do you remember their births?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

In what order were your brothers and sisters born; give names and birth dates?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you feel about your brothers and sisters; like them; love them; afraid of them; share a room with them?

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Junior High**

What was Junior High School like for you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Were you popular or were you ignored by others?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How would your teachers have described you; how did that differ from grade school; how did you change?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How would your classmates have described you; how did that differ from grade school; how did you change?

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your successes?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your failures?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you spend your free time; sports; band; friends; alone; with family; reading; homework?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did you or any of your family have any physical health problems; mental health problems; alcohol or drug problems; accidents; prison terms; long periods away from home?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Describe any changes in your family patterns: moving; deaths; divorces; foster care; adoption; lived with relatives; lived with friends; not allowed to see relatives; live in or step parents; etc.

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your parents get along; stepparents; did this change from grade school?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your parents settle differences; step parents; did this change from grade school?

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did your parents handle stress; stepparents; how did this change from grade school?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did your family's religious practice change at all; were you embarrassed, ashamed; afraid; participated?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did you know if your parents/step parents had sex; did they have sex with anyone else; with you or your siblings, friends or cousins?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Senior High:**

What was high school like for you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were the significant events; who were the significant people?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were you interested in; music; sports; academics; politics?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your successes?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your failures?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Any changes in your family since Junior High School?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did you have a job; enjoy it; to help out family; support your self?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your dreams and plans for your life then; have they changed?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you feel about yourself; did you have a strong identity; conflicted identity; healthy opinion of your self; need another to feel complete?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who did you confide in; who were you close to; were you lonely?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did you use alcohol; drugs; cigarettes; other addictive substances?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What were your dating patterns, length of relationships; type of relationships?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Did your parents/step parents try to control your behavior; why; how?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What kind of sexual involvement/relationships did you have; was sex a factor in your decisions?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Who decided how sexually involved/active you were going to be; did you practice protected sex?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you get along with your peers; popular; felt alone; left out?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

How did you think others perceived you; did you agree; why; why not?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What was the most outstanding event(s) in your childhood and adolescent years? If you could change anything, what would it be?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What left the biggest impression that you? What did you learn from that situation that helped you to become an adult?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What is the most important thing that you learned about yourself while completing this exercise?

---

---

---

---

---

---