

Finding Your Story Session 3, March 28

Finding and Using Your Memories to Create Your Memoir

In this, our last session, we'll look ahead to how we want to use what we've learned. We'll discuss what's worked, what's difficult, and what we want to learn about ourselves to be able to write our own story. We'll look at the checklists below that we can use in the future and we'll pay particular attention to the last section titled *Your Current Life, Values, and Beliefs* during today's session. The questions in that section are ones you could easily explore one at a time for months or even years to learn more about yourself. We'll also talk about what you need to begin putting your memoir on paper.

At the end of today's session, we'll assess whether we want to meet again after you've had time to find memories, write down your thoughts, and ponder on what they mean. We'll discuss how much time we will need to create before we gather to work on turning our memories into something we want to share with our families or others.

You may paste these checklists into a Word document to use as you continuously enter new thoughts and memories when they come to you. You might also want to do this in a notebook that you keep near you by assigning a page to each question that you want to explore so you can jot down your thoughts on that page when a memory pops into your head. Once you fill the notebook or a specific part of it, you may want to use the information to cluster or to match your nouns with verbs on the list from our last session.

Finding Your Story Checklists

If you don't know an answer, go to the next question. You don't need to answer every question. Answer those that interest you. This should be a long process that you visit whenever you want to learn something about yourself and your life. You'll see that several questions use the mapping techniques we learned earlier.

Childhood Memories - before adolescence

1. Why did your parents give you your name?
2. Describe your mother. Is she alive? If not, note her age and yours when she died. Can you ever remember her being angry? Why was she angry?
3. Jot down some good memories associated with your mother.
4. Describe your father. Is he alive? If not, note his age and yours when he died. Can you ever remember him being angry? Why was he angry?
5. If you have siblings, list their names and if they were older or younger than you. Describe each sibling as a child and as they are now.
6. Describe your grandparents if you are able. State their names and approximately when they were born and whether they are still alive or when they died. Did you live near them? How involved were they in your childhood? If they lived far from you, note how often you saw them and where they lived. Did you have a favorite grandparent? Did you think any of your grandparents were mean or distant?
7. Describe your aunts or uncles or any other relatives that were a part of your childhood life.
8. Name some of the dishes you ate as a child. What were your favorites? Who made them?
9. Did you have any unique family traditions?
10. Jot down a few foods you remember from your childhood. Were there any foods or recipes that you loved? Who made them? Did you have to eat any foods you hated? Who made them?
11. What is your earliest memory?
12. What is your happiest childhood memory?
13. What is your saddest childhood memory?
14. Do you ever remember being afraid as a child?
15. Did you have any medical issues as a child?
16. What did you enjoy doing as a child? Did you have hobbies? Did you participate in sports?
17. Do you still do any of the things mentioned in the previous question?
18. Do you think your parents were good parents? How would you define a good parent?
19. Are you like either of your parents? How are you similar or different?
20. Do you think your family was poor, wealthy, or in between? Did you ever suffer because of lack of money?
21. How do you think the color of your skin affected your early childhood?

22. Can you recall any single event in your childhood that has had an impact on you as an adult?
23. What's your first memory of school? Did you attend preschool? Describe your preschool or kindergarten.
24. Can you remember learning to read and write? Was it a struggle or a joy?
25. Who was your favorite teacher? Why?
26. Who was your least favorite teacher? Why?
27. Did a teacher or any other adult at your school say anything to you that had an impact on you? What and how did it make you feel?
28. What was your favorite subject in school?
29. What was your least favorite subject in school?
30. Did you like recess? Why or why not?
31. Who was your first best friend? List his or her name and describe him or her. Are you still in contact with him or her? Does he or she have memories of your childhood together?
32. How was your family unique?
33. Did you have a pet? Describe your pet and how you felt about it.
34. How did your family spend holidays?
35. Did your family go on vacations? Describe any memorable ones.
36. On a blank piece of paper, draw a map of your childhood neighborhood when you were five years old. Draw a map of it when you were ten. Is it different? Add names of people who lived there.
37. Draw a map of your room when you were six or younger.
38. Draw a map of your room when you were between seven and twelve.
39. Draw a map of the table where you ate most of your childhood meals.
40. Draw a map of the room where you and your family spent most of your time together.
41. If you went to church as a child, draw a map of your church and the place where you sat during worship? Draw a map of your favorite room in your church if you had one. Do you associate any foods or smells with your church?
42. Draw a picture of your grade school. Draw either a hallway, a classroom, the gym, or the playground.
43. Now that you've drawn maps, see if you can better answer the earlier questions.

High School and Teenage Memories

1. How big was your high school? Was it in a rural, urban, or suburban area?
2. Was there anything unique about your high school? What?

3. Were there popular kids? What were they like? Were you one of them?
4. What kind of grades did you make? Was school hard for you? Did you study a lot?
5. What were your favorite subjects? What subjects didn't you enjoy?
6. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities or sports at your school?
7. Did you work during the school year? If so, what did you do?
8. Did you work in the summer? If so, what did you do?
9. Did you win any awards or accolades? Were you known for being good at anything in particular?
10. Did you have any medical issues in high school?
11. How would people describe you when you were in high school?
12. How would you describe yourself in high school?
13. How do you think the color of your skin affected your teen years?
14. Did you have lots of friends or a few close friends? What did you do together?
15. Did you date in high school? Did you have a boy or girl friend? How serious was your relationship?
16. Did you have any sexual relationships in high school? If so, describe how you felt about them.
17. What did you do on the weekends?
18. What was your favorite music? Name some of the bands or songs you liked. Did you go to any concerts or dances with live music?
19. Did you have a Prom? Did you go? Describe your date.
20. Did you have a favorite teacher?
21. Were there any adults outside your family who influenced you? How?
22. What did you learn about yourself in high school?
23. Was church or religion a part of your life in high school? What impact did it have on you?
24. Draw a map of a hallway, room, or part of your high school. Put objects and people you recall in it. After this, go back and see if you have new insights into earlier questions on this list.

Young Adulthood including college, vocational school, and/or early work experience from age 18 through your early twenties

1. Do you attend college directly after high school? Where? Why did you go there? Where did you live?

2. Did you go to work directly after high school? Where did you work? What did you do? Did you live at home or elsewhere? If at home, how long did you live there? Why did you leave?
3. Did you attend a vocational school or learn a trade after high school? What did you learn? Where did you live? How long did you learn your trade before you could begin working?
4. If you attended college, what was your major? Did you change majors? Why? What did you want or plan to do when you entered college?
5. Did you participate in activities on campus? Were you in a fraternity, sorority, or other social group? What was it like? Did you like it?
6. Did you meet people who were different than you knew in high school? Who? What made them different? What did you learn from them? What did they learn from you?
7. How do you think the color of your skin affected your young adulthood?
8. Did you date after high school? Did you have a boy friend or girl friend? How serious was your relationship or relationships?
9. Did you have any sexual relationships after high school or in early adulthood? If so, describe how you felt about them?
10. Was birth control a difficulty or problem then?
11. What was your favorite music? Name some of the bands or songs you liked? Did you go to concerts or dances with live music? What were they like? Describe any memorable ones.
12. What was your first full time job? Describe what you did? How much did you earn? Were you able to support yourself on your first salary? Why or why not? Where did you live?
13. After a year or two of working, what were you doing? Did you change jobs? Why or why not?
14. What did you do outside of work?
15. Did you fall in love? Describe the person?
16. If you married in your twenties, describe how you met your spouse. Describe your spouse. Describe your wedding if you had one. Did you have a honeymoon? If so, where? Why there? What was it like?
17. Did you move away from where you grew up? Why?
18. Was church or religion a part of your life during these years? How?
19. What did you learn about yourself during these years?

Parenthood if you had children

1. How old were you when your first child was born? What did you name that child? Why did you choose that name?
2. Were you married or in a supportive relationship when you had your first child? Did having a child change your relationship?
3. If you were not in a relationship when you had your first child, describe what it was like, if you had any support, and how you coped.
4. How do you think the color of your skin and the color of your children's skin affected you as a parent? How did it affect your child's childhood?
5. What did you find the most difficult about being a new parent?
6. If you had more than one child, answer questions one through three about that child.
7. What do you wish you'd done differently when your child or children were young? When they were a teenager?
8. Did any world events change you as a parent?
9. What are you glad you did as a parent?
10. Did being a parent change you? How?
11. What did becoming a parent teach you about yourself?
12. Was church or religion a part of your being a parent? How did or didn't it impact you as a parent?
13. Do you have a relationship with your children now? Describe it.
14. If your child were to describe you, what would they say? Do you think they know the real you?
15. Did you move because you had children? Why? Are you glad you moved or not?
16. Draw a picture or map of the home and yard (if you had one) of the place you lived when you became a parent.

Your Current Life, Values, and Beliefs

1. What words describe you?
2. Are you an extrovert, introvert, or ambivert?
3. What words would people who know you use to describe you?
4. What words would you like people to associate with you?
5. What was the greatest challenge of your life?
6. What do you wish you'd done differently in life?
7. What's great about your current life?
8. What could be better about your current life?
9. What are one or two of the best things that have happened in your life?

10. Write about food. What is your relationship with food? What foods do you love? Dislike? Do you enjoy cooking? Do you enjoy eating out?
11. What's your favorite color? Why?
12. What's your favorite time of day? Why? What do you do then?
13. How did you end up doing what you did as a career? Did you change careers? Why?
14. How did or does your career make you happy, challenge you, or make you unhappy?
15. How were your belief systems formed? (Religion, Politics, etc.)? Have they changed? Why?
16. Who was the biggest influence (positive or negative) on your life? Describe.
17. If you are married or in a relationship, how does that relationship affect your life? Describe your partner. Do you and your partner complement each other? What about your relationship is difficult? Why?
18. What one person do you wish you could see again? Why?
19. What makes you happy?
20. What do your pet peeves reveal about you?
21. What do your tastes reveal about you? (Food, music, clothing, books, activities, etc.)
22. Why do you live where you live? If you could move, would you?
23. To what degree has technology positively or negatively shaped your life in the last ten years?
24. When was the last time you learned to do something new?
25. What would you like to learn? What's stopping you from learning it?
26. What do you think the future holds for you? How do you feel about that?
27. What will your obituary say?
28. Who or what scares you?
29. What makes you uncomfortable? Why? To avoid being uncomfortable, do you ever miss out on things you'd like to do?
30. What's missing in your life?
31. What makes you say "Wow!?"? Why?
32. If you contribute to nonprofit or political organizations, why do you do so? Why do you give to them? Do you think you give enough?
33. How does the color of your skin affect your life?
34. Have any major world, national, or local events had an impact on you?
35. If you have children or grandchildren, how are you sharing your personal beliefs and values with them?
36. Are you the kind of person who speaks out about controversial issues? Why or why not?
37. Describe your philosophy on life in a single sentence.

38. Describe your faith beliefs and practices?
39. If you read the Bible regularly, how does that influence you?
40. Why do you go to church?
41. How do your religious beliefs affect your political beliefs?
42. What do you feel most proud of accomplishing?
43. If you could change five laws in your country, what would you change? What are you doing to change them?
44. What's your favorite place? Describe it. Why do you love it?
45. What was your favorite vacation?
46. Do you have a bucket list of places you want to visit? Why haven't you gone?
47. If you were given \$1,000.00 and told to give it away but that you couldn't give it to anyone in your family, what would you do with it?
48. Who do you admire? Why?
49. Is there anyone to whom you need to say "I'm sorry," "Thank you," "I love you," or "I forgive you" to? What's stopping you?
50. Are there other particular things you feel you need to say to your loved ones?
51. What are your hopes and dreams for your loved ones? Do they know them?
52. What are you most grateful for in your life?
53. When all is said and done, what would you like your legacy to be? What are you doing now to make it happen? What does thinking about it make you want to do?
54. Draw a picture or map of the place where you spend the majority of your time.
55. Draw a picture or map of the place in your home or close by where you are happiest.