

THE MEMOIR – EASY TO WRITE AND NOW EASY TO PUBLISH

by Charles Jacobs

What could be more rewarding to you and to your loved ones than writing a memoir? It makes little difference that you're not a celebrity or a high level politician. Whether you're a plumber, an engineer, a college professor, you have a history, a story, and your kids and grandkids will thrill to read it.

For you, it's a chance to formalize on paper all of those tips and suggestions that have guided your own life and want to pass on to future generations. It's an opportunity to increase their pride in the history of the family and in your own accomplishments.

For family member and close friends, it is a better chance to understand you, your underlying philosophy of life, the things that most mattered to you, the hopes and dreams that motivated you. It will long remain as a cherished reminder of your essence and those wonderful moments they spent with you.

New Technology Makes It Easy

For many years, it was extremely difficult and costly to publish those memories and convictions in an attractive book format. Not so today. Wondrous new printing technology has brought down the costs dramatically and for the first time made it possible to print short runs of books and not fill a garage with rotting unsold volumes as used to happen with vanity presses.

For novice authors, even those interested in limited distribution to a small circle of intimates, there are companies and individual coaches who can guide you through all of the rigors of publishing. Book coaches are available at relatively modest fees to assist in the writing. Book shepherds, as they are called, can walk you through each step of the production process. Many of us offer a combination of these to clients.

This new technology has given rise to a new publishing industry labeled Publishing on Demand or POD. These companies—and they are profit minded businesses—take the manuscript you submit and turn it into a finished and attractive book little different from the books you find in a bookstore. Of course there is a fee that the author must pay, but it is quite reasonable compared to the huge charges of the old vanities.

Average production charges run from \$500 to \$1,500, depending on the reputation of the POD house and the bells and whistles that you request. Most of those additional are promotion materials the company prints for you and mails out. I strongly recommend you bypass those offers. They are not terribly effective and you certainly don't need promotion if you are limiting distribution to just friends and family. Editing and rewriting, if you desire it, will also be an additional charge.

The Publishing Process

I have found when delivering speeches about writing that most newcomers fear the publishing process far more than the writing of a memoir. They find themselves lost in the maze of book publishing, and desperately cry for guidance. That was one of the principal reasons I wrote *The Writer Within You*. It breaks down and explains each step of the publishing process.

Once the POD house receives the manuscript, it must design and format it to the book page. A staff artist creates a professional cover. The ISBN, a global identification number, must be obtained, as well as barcodes. Libraries will not accept your book unless it is catalogued by the Library of Congress, another task completed by the POD house. Securing the copyright is next.

When all of this has been accomplished, the material moves to a printer selected by the POD house, and is shipped to you in whatever quantity you want. This can be as little as 20 or 25 books. However, you can continue to fill in as needed by calling the publisher and ordering another five or ten or whatever quantity you find you need. The POD house will charge you an additional amount for each book you buy, but the cost will be discounted well below the retail price.

Writing the Book

The memoir should be the easiest of the various genres to write. It does require some careful preparation, but the author is able to call upon personal experiences and call upon close friends and family members to validate memories and possibly to suggest others. Many families have genealogical family trees to review, and official documents are generally available through the city or county clerk's office.

So how does one begin? D.G. Fulford of www.familyhistories.com explains that "Our minds are filing systems...The merest cue can call up what we thought was lost." I always recommend a simple exercise when I am asked how to bring up those cues. For one week, devote one hour every day to recalling distant memories.

Clear your mind of all current distractions, and concentrate on recalling parties, special events, vacations, clothing that you loved wearing. In fact, anything and any event that had great meaning. Try to remember the first day of kindergarten, some of your teachers or classmates throughout your school years. Work experiences are important, as is your personal life as an adult. Any of these and many more thoughts will trigger meaningful memories that can fill your book.

Write these down at the end of each session. You will be amazed at how quickly they open the door to other facts or anecdotes. Before long, you will see a basic theme developing, based upon the things that mattered most to you throughout your years.

Sort all of that into a logical sequence and voila! You've got your book.

Of course, I have over-simplified the process, but there are many fine books on writing a memoir that are available to you at the library or bookstore. What I have attempted to show you is that you can do it. You can write it and you can publish it. What a wonderful gift that will be to you and to those you care most about.