

Mining Childhood Memories

1.

“Anything processed by memory is fiction.” – Wright Morris

A good story teller captures our imagination with compelling settings, characters and tensions. Their stories evoke emotions. And that’s why pulling from our emotionally packed childhood memories is such a great resource.

To help bring story details to mind, make notes that include:

- What took place
- Who was involved
- What you saw
- What you heard - including background noise.
- What you smelled
- What you felt
- What, if anything you learned

Use sensory stimuli to bring back memories

Run your memories through each of the senses: sight, sound, smell, touch and taste.

Visual cues

Old photos, movies, memorabilia such as marked up maps, souvenirs, toys, childhood jewelry, clothing, saved school assignments. Inherited papers, photos or clippings. Nostalgia sites & groups. Let yourself be side-tracked.

Memorable moments

Start with the easiest, and the easiest stories to write are the ones you feel passionate about.

Choose a topic or memory that’s important to you.

Create a word bank

Write down every word you can think of for a person, place or event you’d like to remember.

Example for the event of *Jumping off a swing for the first time:*

Park, wind in hair, heart in throat, fear, sky, feet up, knees, chains– rust on hands, dry, grip, dropped-stomach feeling, wind, sand in shoes, other kids, sister, proud, thrill, scootching forward in swing, falling

Brainstorming

The following pages are worksheets for brainstorming. Change and add to the lists as ideas come to you.

Rules of Brainstorming:

- Do not use full sentences
- Do not edit
- Do not spell check as you go
- Neatness doesn’t count
- Write and review later

Happy mining!

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Warmup

2.

Get your pen or pencil ready. In twenty seconds, write down every word that comes into your mind when you hear the word, **recess**. Remember the rules: no full sentences, no editing, correct spelling is optional, neatness does not count, and wait and review later.

Give yourself a couple of minutes on this one:

Who were the most important people in your childhood?

Try writing a memory about one of these people:

Brainstorming for Early Years

About: _____ (your name, a friend or relative.)

Jot down ideas about the things you might want to write about, both outstanding and mundane.

No full sentences. Just a bank of ideas:

Personality as a young child:

Look at the word choices, and jot down any thoughts that come mind. Some might be a story in themselves, others might be the flavors to stir up other memories.

- Exuberant or careful?
- Spontaneous or a planner?
- Extremely active, active, calm or sedentary
- Creative and artistic, or the little engineer at work
- Like to get dirty, or clean freak. Willing to touch gooey things?
- Pick eater? What didn't you like to eat
- Special abilities or disabilities? (such as fine motor skills, speed, or memory. Singing voice?)
- Friendly & outgoing or shy & quiet or fearful

Your Childhood Home

3.

20 or 30 min., writing & drawing. Feel free to erase when drawing.

Your childhood home

Can you draw the floorplan?

What about the garden, front, back, both sides.

What kind of plants. Did you have a a patio, deck, balcony.

Place: (city, state, country)

Neighborhood type: (urban suburban, rural)

Time period:

Exterior

Style & size of the house or building

Special features of this dwelling:

Size of lot

Memorable trees or plants

Outdoor structures (such as a barn, shed, play structure, tree house, sand box)

Specific memories associated with yard or home's exterior.

Did you have a garage? (How was it used? For cars, bikes, washing machine, jump rope on rainy days)

Interior

Briefly describe the layout:

Clean, cluttered, immaculate or otherwise?

Rooms

Briefly describe the kitchen and who was in it most often

Describe where you slept

Where you played

Where the family gathered or where holidays were celebrated

Any quirky, secret places?

Associations

Describe the sounds (or sights or smells) that you associate with this home.

Describe the emotion you associate with this home.

Random memories

Word bank for your childhood home

- Exterior appearance: (such as bleak, forbidding, cavernous, tiny, homey)
- Interior appearance: (for example, clean, cluttered, flashy, hospitable, light, dark)
- Furnishings: (comfy, chic, elegant, mismatched, masculine, dingy)
- Activity level: (bustling, lively, quiet)
- Mood: (angry, cheerful, depressing, cozy, safe)
- Sounds or sound level: (boisterous, oppressive silence, buzzing)
- Smells: (aromatic, earth, moldy, pet smells, other)

Childhood as a River

4.

20 or 30 min., writing & drawing. Feel free to erase when drawing.

Imagine your life as a river.

With pencil and paper, begin charting the course your river took as a child. As you think about the following points, adjust the course of your river as necessary. Feel free to erase and redraw as you reconsider. When the river changes course, consider whether it was a gentle change or an abrupt u-turn. Include the markers (like boulders and submerged rocks) that caused the water to become tumultuous or calm. Draw or label them, whether they're internal (rising consciousness of yourself and others, trust broken or gained, maturing, learning something new) or external (new school, new sibling, moving, life changes, illness, being bullied). Use the weather as metaphor, if that's helpful. Drawing and writing as full an environment in and around your river as you can. Label the start of the river for the age group for whom you are writing. Or, make this your entire childhood, or life, if you feel like it.

- What times in your childhood did you experience calm waters
- What was happening in your life at those times?
- Mark the internal and external influences that caused the current to calm
- Did your river run pretty straight? Meander? Branch out? Eddy? Why?
- When did the current move quickly?
- What increased the flow?
- Was there white water? Why? (draw it, if you like)
- Was it a joyful ride or did you feel like you were being pulled under? (draw it, if you like)
- Who or what affected the current?
- Did you feel like you had the safety of an inner tube, or did you wish for a helmet? Did anyone throw you a life saver? Were you able to grab it?
- Did you have an oar or a paddle, or were you tossed about with no means of controlling events.
- Did the white water grow into rapids? Were you in danger? What were the submerged rocks or whirlpools that seemed inescapable?
- Any waterfalls? How close did you come to going over? What stopped or saved you – or did you go over? What happened at the bottom?
- Any stagnant spots? What was happening?
- What changes did you yearn for?

Family Traditions and Recipes

5.

Family traditions and recipes

- How did you spend the different holidays?
- List the ones your family celebrated and how
- List any fiasco's you remember
- Were there any weekly or daily traditions? (Meatloaf on Tuesday, housecleaning Sat)
- Any hobbies passed on from generation to generation? (stamps, rocks)
- Did your family prepare certain meals for special occasions
- Were there recipes or meals that, for instance, only Grandma could make
- Was there any food that was normal for your family, but not mainstream in your community? (Not just ethnic, but strange things. Like peanut butter, pickle & mayonaise sandwiches)

Little traditions

- Did you have a bedtime ritual or routine
- Where did you go on vacation, if you had places you returned to regularly
- Did you do community service or volunteer as a child or with your family

Other Childhood Memories

Look at the following list of ideas. If any strike a chord, jot down some notes. As you do, include notes about context, both emotional and sensory, so that you can come back to them later to develop a story.

- Telling ghost stories:
- Vacations or camping trips:
- Family get-togethers:
- Weird relatives:
- Childhood pranks:
- Getting busted: (by parents, teachers, or law enforcement)
- First jobs: (paper routes, babysitting, mowing lawns)
- Fairs, parades, fun parks:
- Backyard games:
- Scars and how you got them:
- Youth Group Trips: (church, school, music, overnight and camps, and so on)

School Memories

6.

- What was the name of your school (elementary, middle or high, depending on your grade)
- What years did you attend.
- Where was your school located
- What were your best and worst subjects
- Was it a big school, small
- What did kids wear to your school (uniform, fads, styles)
- What did you play during recess (or older, sports, extra-curricular)
- Did you have any favorites before or after school hangouts
- What was your first-ever day of school like (describe your teacher, classmates, friends, any special happenings?)
- Did you have any annual, first day of school routines? (meeting the teacher, walking sibs to their classrooms, new clothes, etc.)
- How did teachers help, inspire, or become role models to you.
- Did any teachers have amusing foibles? What things did they do then that wouldn't be allowed today
- Who was your favorite teacher and why
- Did you ever have a crush on a teacher
- Did you ever dream of being just like the teacher
- Did you have rainy day activities, or did you go outside at recess in the rain.
- Did you walk to school, ride bike, get a ride
- Were you ever the new kid
- Were you bullied
- When did you help someone
- Any memorable illnesses, injuries, actual or feigned)
- Playground incidences?
- What classmate or class mates stand out in your mind
- Were any notorious? For what?
- What was the klutziest thing you did that stands out
- Did you win any awards
- If a 'most likely to' vote were held in your elementary school, what would the vote be for you (middle school, high school)
- Were the votes right? Why or why not"
- Has all this remembering brought any more thoughts to the forefront? Write them down.

Childhood Antics

7.

Under each category, add whatever thoughts occur. Jot down just enough notes that you can come back and use this list as an idea bank.

- Situations in church or temple (things said or done during the children's sermon, service, school, or class)

- Childishly honest observations (things said upon meeting or observing someone who looked different; honest assessments of family members' looks.)

- Situations with playmates: (partners in crime, jealousy, competitiveness, fights, loyalty, observations about friends)

- Messes and attempts to hide the evidence. What did you break?

Resources

Books:

"Memories of Me: A Complete Guide to Telling and Sharing the Stories of Your Life," by Laura Hedgecock

"Unlocking the Secrets of your Childhood Memories," by Kevin Leman and Randy Carlson

Writing prompts and worksheets:

- www.cedarfort.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Memories-of-Me-worksheets.pdf
- <https://writeshop.com/childhood-memories-writing-prompts/>
- <https://leslieibhardtgoodman.wordpress.com/2015/05/20/over-100-ways-to-awaken-your-childhood-memories-wednesday-prompts-and-inspirations/>

Articles:

- www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/writing-from-memory
- www.sciencealert.com/we-might-be-able-to-unlock-our-forgotten-childhood-memories-says-new-research