



Christian Writers for Life Monthly Digest

August 2023: Writing Your Family Story

During the hot summer days of August, we enjoy our last weeks of vacation, gather our family for the annual August family reunion, start getting our children ready to go back to school, and start enjoying again the many functions of church activities. August is a “wrap-up” month. Summer is almost over and we anticipate getting into a more settled and predictable schedule as we ease into Autumn.

I believe August proves the perfect time to think about writing our family’s story. Family histories serve as an invaluable heritage, offering a rich tapestry of stories, wisdom, biblical teachings, and connections that connect the past, present, and future.

So much information can be passed down through family histories, including biblical instruction and faith, unique familial traits, customs, family traditions, and hereditary health conditions that can offer information and insights that can help shape our own lives and those of our children and grandchildren. If your family story includes heartache and tragedy, you can write about God’s faithfulness in your life to bring beauty from ashes.

The Apostle Paul commends Timothy on his sincere faith, citing it as a gift from his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. These two devoted women passed down to their son and grandson sound biblical instruction as they told him their family's story (see 2 Timothy 1:5).

When you write your family's story, you are making a loving and profound commitment to preserve and honor your lineage, paving the way for future generations to understand their roots, appreciate their history, know the family's spiritual heritage, learn about unknown ancestors, and draw strength and inspiration from those who came before them. More than two thousand years later, we still give thanks for Lois and Eunice and their Christian influence on young Timothy.

God bless you as you write for Him!

Denise George

August's Writer Profile: Corrie ten Boom

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian woman, wrote her family's story in the book, *The Hiding Place*. Authors John and Elizabeth Sherrill served as her collaborators, helping Corrie pen her family history.

Corrie was born on April 15, 1892, in Haarlem, The Netherlands. The ten Booms were devout Christians who dedicated their lives to service and charity. They lived in a house known as the *Beje*, which also functioned as a watch shop. During World War II, the ten Boom family decided to harbor Jews and other fugitives at risk from the Nazi regime. Their home was ingeniously reconfigured to contain a secret room—the “hiding place,” where those in danger could hide during Nazi searches.

In 1944, however, the family was betrayed and arrested. Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp for women in Germany. The women held firmly to their faith, sharing the gospel with their fellow prisoners. Betsie died in the camp, but Corrie was released in late December 1944 due to a clerical error, just one week before all the women her age were killed.

After the war, Corrie continued her Christian ministry, traveling around the world to share her family's story and to promote the gospel's message of forgiveness, hope, and reconciliation. She wrote *The Hiding Place* in 1971, and it became a film in 1975. Corrie's life, work, and writings had a significant impact on Christian thought and the global Christian community. She died on April 15, 1983, on her ninety-first birthday. Corrie's book spoke to a large mainstream audience, and it was published by a traditional publisher, Chosen Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group. The book has been extremely popular, has been translated into many languages, and has sold millions of copies worldwide.

Read Like a Writer

When you begin to think about writing your family's story, you might want to read some family histories written as books published by traditional publishers. This will give you an idea of how to write a book that communicates to a broad, mainstream audience.

Here are some suggestions:

- *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom. Boom, a Dutch Christian, wrote this memoir recounting her family's experiences during the Holocaust.
- *God's Smuggler* by Brother Andrew. This is a family history/autobiography of a Dutch Christian who smuggled Bibles into communist countries during the Cold War.
- *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* by C. S. Lewis. In this memoir, Lewis reflects on his early life, including his spiritual journey from atheism to Christianity.
- *The Cross and the Switchblade* by David Wilkerson. Wilkerson, a Christian evangelist, shares his experiences ministering to troubled youth in New York City.
- *A Severe Mercy* by Sheldon Vanauken. Vanauken, a Christian writer, recounts his love story with his wife, Davy, and their spiritual journey together.
- *Evidence Not Seen: A Woman's Miraculous Faith in the Jungles of World War II* by Darlene Deibler Rose. This story tells about a young woman, newly married to her childhood sweetheart, surviving in a Japanese POW camp in the Pacific theater during WWII.

- *Kisses from Katie: A Story of Relentless Love and Redemption* by Katie Davis. The story tells about Katie's move to Uganda and the thirteen girls she adopted before she was twenty-three years old.
- *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley. This book tells the family history of Haley's ancestors over several generations, beginning with Kunta Kinte, an 18th-century African who was captured and brought to America as a slave.

Think Like a Writer

As you start to think about writing your family history, here are a few things to consider if you want to address a mainstream audience and publish with a traditional publisher:

- **Storytelling:** While the goal is to record family history, remember you're also writing for an audience. Use the principles of storytelling to make the narrative engaging. Consider how to weave together various threads of your family story into a coherent narrative.
- **Character Development:** Family members should be developed as characters, complete with desires, obstacles, and arcs. Flesh out their personalities, motivations, and changes over time to help the reader connect with them.
- **Context:** Provide historical, cultural, and geographical context to help the reader understand your family's experiences.
- **Themes:** Identify the themes of your family history. This could be resilience in the face of adversity, the pursuit of a dream, the impact of immigration, etc.

- **Conflict and Resolution:** Even in a family history, there should be conflicts and resolutions. This gives your story a sense of momentum and keeps the reader engaged.
- **Respect for Privacy:** Be aware of the potential sensitivities involved in sharing family stories. Consider how your family members might feel about their lives being published. When possible, get their consent before you write.
- **Authenticity:** Be true to the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of your family members. Don't shy away from the complex realities of family life.
- **Fact-Checking:** Make sure to get the facts right. Use family documents, public records, and interviews to verify information.
- **Writing Style:** Aim for clarity, precision, and vividness in your writing. Also consider your voice, tone, and perspective.
- **Identifying Your Target Audience:** Who will want to read this book? What will the book do for this specific reader and why?
- **Book Proposal:** If you decide to go with a traditional publisher, you'll need to write a strong book proposal.
- **Literary Agent:** Consider seeking a literary agent. An agent can help you find the right publisher and negotiate a good contract.

Build Your Platform

Writing your family's story can be a powerful way to build your personal brand or platform, especially if you're interested in a career as a writer, historian, genealogist, speaker, or other related fields.

Here's how:

- **Showcasing Your Expertise:** Writing your family history demonstrates your research, writing, and storytelling skills. It can also establish you as a knowledgeable individual in specific areas like local history, genealogy, or the specific themes/topics covered in your history.
- **Connecting with Readers:** Family histories often resonate with readers who see parallels in their own lives. By telling your story, you invite others to reflect on their own histories, fostering a connection with your readership.
- **Building a Niche Audience:** Your family's story might revolve around a particular theme or geographic region. Readers with interest in these areas may become part of your dedicated audience.
- **Generating Content for Multiple Platforms:** Your family history can be a source of various types of content: blog posts, social media updates, podcast episodes, lectures, or workshops. This varied content can help you reach and engage with a wider audience.
- **Networking:** The process of writing and promoting your family history can help you connect with other writers, historians, genealogists, and professionals in the publishing industry.
- **Public Speaking and Teaching Opportunities:** Your expertise in your family's history and the process of documenting it might lead to opportunities for public speaking or teaching, further expanding your platform.
- **Potential Media Interest:** If there's a unique or intriguing aspect to your family history, it might attract media interest—interviews, features, reviews—which can significantly boost your visibility.

To make the most of these opportunities, consider the following strategies:

- **Create a professional website or blog** where you can share updates about your project, excerpts from your work, your research process, and your reflections on the experience.
- **Be active on social media.** Share interesting findings, pose thought-provoking questions, and engage with your followers.
- **Collaborate** with libraries, schools, or community centers to offer workshops or talks about your process and discoveries.
- **Network** with other writers, historians, and genealogists. Attend conferences, join professional organizations, and contribute to online forums.
- **Write articles** or essays related to your family history for magazines, newspapers, or online platforms. This can help establish your expertise and reach a larger audience.

Remember, building a platform takes time and consistent effort. Be patient with yourself and celebrate each new connection and achievement along the way.

Let's Get Published!

If your family's story would benefit a large, mainstream audience, you might consider having it traditionally published. This might involve hiring a literary agent to help place your manuscript. It would also mean writing up a detailed book proposal answering questions about the meaning of your book, the story line, the targeted audience, and what it would do for the readers, etc.

It you are writing this history just for your family, you should consider self-publishing the book. This gives you complete control over the content, design, and distribution. I also suggest a self-published author to check out amazon.com and its KDP publishing platform. The publishing is free.

If you have the money, you can pay to have a hybrid publisher help you publish the book. A hybrid publisher will charge an upfront fee but will help you with some of the major tasks. Always check out the publisher you want to work with—their costs, what services they provide, their reputation, references, etc.

Or you might want to ask each family member to research and write a part of the family history, type it, and make printed copies for each family member. It doesn't need to be fancy, although it can be. It can be as simple or as complicated as you wish it to be.

Let's Make Some Money!

Collaborating with a family to write their history can be a rewarding project, both personally and financially. However, several factors should be considered before embarking on such a venture.

Here's a guide to help you navigate this process:

- **Clarify Expectations and Scope of Work:** Understand what the family expects from the project. This includes the format, the length, the depth of research required, and any specific stories or individuals they want to focus on.
- **Create a Contract or Agreement:** A contract should clearly outline the scope of work, project timeline, payment schedule, rights and ownership of the finished product, confidentiality and privacy considerations, and how any potential disputes will be resolved.

- **Determine Compensation:** Rates for this type of project can vary greatly depending on the scope, the amount of research required, the writer's experience, and the expected final output. Some writers charge an hourly rate (which could range from \$20 to \$100 or more), while others may charge per word or per project. You might also consider expenses like travel, access to archives or databases, and any materials needed.
- **Payment Schedule:** It's common to receive part of the payment upfront, with additional payments at various milestones throughout the project. This ensures that you receive compensation for your work even if the project scope changes or if the project is cancelled.
- **Discuss Ownership and Rights:** Who will own the finished product? Can the writer use it as part of their portfolio or sell it elsewhere? These matters should be clarified and agreed upon before work begins.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Discuss what information is confidential and establish how sensitive information will be handled. This is especially crucial when dealing with living individuals or sensitive family matters.
- **Revisions and Approvals:** Establish a process for reviewing, revising, and approving the work. Make sure the agreement specifies how many rounds of revisions are included in the initial fee and how additional revisions will be charged.
- **Contingency Plans:** What happens if the project takes longer than anticipated, if additional research is required or if the family wants to change the scope partway through? These possibilities should be accounted for in your contract.

Lastly, it's crucial to maintain open and clear communication with the family throughout the project. Regular updates can help manage expectations and ensure that the project stays on track.

Writing someone else's family history is a significant responsibility, but it can also be a deeply rewarding experience. By addressing these issues upfront, you can ensure a smoother process and a more satisfying final product.

August's Writing Tip

August is a popular time for many families to have reunions. These gatherings often feature unique family traditions, dishes, songs, games, or stories. Use these family gatherings as an opportunity to explore these traditions and the history behind them.

Here's where the "Celebrate and Recreate" part comes in: Pick a tradition or a dish that your family often enjoys together in August, research its history and origins in your family, and then recreate it!

For instance, is there a special dish that your grandmother always makes for the summer reunion? Interview her and learn how to make it. Ask where she learned the recipe, why it's important to her, and any special memories associated with it. Write about this experience, describing the smells, tastes, textures, and the stories that emerge while you're cooking.

Or maybe your family always goes to a particular place in August—a lake house, a city, a country. Dive into its history. When did your family start visiting this place? Why? What does it mean to your family? What are some memorable incidents that happened there?

By "celebrating and recreating," you not only get to participate in your family's traditions but also understand them better. It's a great way to

gather information for your family history and also create new memories associated with it.

It adds a touch of personal experience and hands-on research to your writing, which can make your narrative more engaging and meaningful for your readers.

How to Market Your Family History Book

With a few exceptions, marketing a book about your family's history is like marketing any book. It involves reaching out to an audience interested in the specific themes, periods, places, or experiences you've written about.

Here are some strategies you could consider:

- **Create a Website or Blog:** Having a central online hub where interested readers can learn about your book, read excerpts, get updates, and purchase or find purchasing links is crucial. This also gives you a platform to blog about your writing and research process, share extra content, and connect with your readers.
- **Use Social Media:** Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others can help you connect with potential readers. Share snippets of your story, photos, or documents you found in your research, and thoughts about the process of writing the book.
- **Host a Book Launch Event:** This could be a physical event or an online one, where you invite friends, family, colleagues, and interested readers to celebrate the publication of your book. You could give a talk or reading, answer questions, and sign books.
- **Reach Out to Local Media:** If your family's story is tied to a specific location, local newspapers, radio stations, or community newsletters might be interested in featuring your book.

- **Give Talks or Host Workshops:** Libraries, community centers, schools, or genealogical societies may be interested in having you talk about your research process, the challenges of writing family history, or specific aspects of the history you uncovered.
- **Connect with Genealogy Groups:** Online forums, social media groups, and local clubs that focus on genealogy would likely be interested in your book. Sharing your experience and tips with them can draw attention to your work.
- **Leverage Online Retailers:** If your book is sold on sites like Amazon, encourage readers to leave reviews, as these can significantly influence potential buyers. Make sure your book is listed in the right categories to reach your target audience.
- **Collaborate with Book Bloggers and Reviewers:** Send copies of your book to bloggers, YouTubers, or reviewers who cover similar themes or genres. Their reviews can reach a wide audience of potential readers.
- **Network with Other Authors:** Connect with other authors, especially those writing in similar areas. They can offer advice, support, and opportunities for collaboration, like joint events or promotions.
- **Consider Paid Advertising:** This can range from ads in publications your target audience reads to online advertising on platforms like Facebook or Google.

Marketing a book is all about understanding who would be interested in your story and finding ways to reach those people. Think about the unique aspects of your family's history and how you can use those to connect with potential readers.

The Writer's Toolkit

When you want to write your family's history, you'll want to gather all these essential elements for writing and researching:

- **Genealogical software or online services:** Websites like Ancestry.com or FamilySearch.org can help you create family trees, discover historical records, and connect with distant relatives.
- **Access to archives and databases:** Libraries and archives often have access to a wealth of information, including census records, military records, and newspapers. Some of this might be available online.
- **Interview equipment:** If you plan to interview family members, a good digital recorder or a smartphone with a high-quality voice recording app is necessary. You may also want a video recording option.
- **Photo scanning and editing software:** If you plan to include photos, you'll need a way to scan and edit them.

Remember, the best tools are the ones that work for you. Try out different options and see what suits your process best. (Check out transcription software, citation software, project management tools, note-taking apps, digital filing systems, etc.) The most important part is to keep everything organized and backed up. Losing work to a computer crash or misplaced documents is a heartache you want to avoid.

Industry Lingo

Here are some terms every writer needs to know, especially those who are writing their family histories:

- **Manuscript:** The original text of an author's work before it's published

- **Genre:** The category of literature your book falls into. For family history, this could be memoir, biography, history, or nonfiction.
- **Narrative Nonfiction:** A genre of nonfiction that uses literary styles and techniques to create factually accurate narratives
- **Memoir:** A subtype of narrative nonfiction that's collection of memories that an individual writes about moments or events, both public and private, that took place in the subject's life
- **Autobiography:** Another subtype of narrative nonfiction. It's a self-written account of the life of oneself. Unlike memoirs, which usually focus on a specific aspect of the author's life, autobiographies generally cover the author's entire life's story.
- **Biography:** An account of a person's life written by someone else
- **Traditional Publishing:** The publication of a book by a traditional publishing house, which involves a more rigorous process including acquisition, editing, design, marketing, and distribution
- **Self-Publishing:** The publication of a book by the author themselves, often using a self-publishing platform like Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

How to Work Well with Industry Professionals

When writing your family's history, there are several industry professionals who can assist you. Each of them brings unique skills and knowledge to the table and can help you create a detailed, engaging, and professionally polished manuscript.

Here are some key professionals you might consider working with:

- **Archivists:** They can help you access and interpret historical documents and artifacts related to your family history.
- **Professional Genealogists:** These experts can assist in uncovering your family lineage and providing detailed historical contexts.
- **Historians:** Specialists in specific areas or periods of history can provide insights and context to the events that your family experienced.
- **Editors:** A good editor can ensure your manuscript is polished, coherent, and compelling. If you are publishing with a traditional publisher, they will take care of the editing. If you are self-publishing your book, consider hiring a freelance editor to help you with editing, proofreading, etc.
- **Proofreaders:** These professionals work after the editors, ensuring no grammatical, punctuation, or spelling mistakes are left in the final copy.
- **Graphic Designers:** If you want to include pictures, diagrams, maps, or charts, a graphic designer can help ensure these elements are professionally presented. Or, if you or a family member are artistic, you can do the graphic designs yourself.
- **Book Designers:** They work on the layout of your book when you traditionally publish, choosing the right fonts, and ensuring readability. Sometimes, if self-publishing your book, you might want to hire someone to format your manuscript according to the requirements of the self-publisher's platform. Or you can learn to format the book yourself.

- **Publishers or Literary Agents:** When you publish your work with a traditional publisher, these professionals can guide you through the publishing process and potentially help you find a market for your book.

Here are some tips to work effectively with these professionals:

- **Clear Communication:** Clearly communicate your vision, objectives, and expectations. Provide detailed briefings and maintain regular communication.
- **Feedback:** Be open to feedback and revisions. These professionals are bringing their expertise to improve the quality of your work. When writing a family history, it's important to receive feedback from family members as well as professionals.
- **Time Management:** Respect their time. Provide materials promptly and be understanding of their timelines and deadlines.
- **Budgeting:** Understand the cost of freelancers' services and budget accordingly. Always agree on fees or rates before work begins to avoid misunderstandings. This is especially important when you are working with hybrid publishers.
- **Collaboration:** Writing is often perceived as a solitary pursuit, but it doesn't have to be. Work together with family members and professionals and learn from their knowledge and experience.

By working effectively with family members and various professionals, you can produce a high-quality family history that will be cherished by generations to come.

The Marketplace

Writing a family history is a unique endeavor that can mean different things to different people. It can be a deeply personal journey of discovery or a meticulously researched scholarly work. Therefore, understanding the marketplace for such books is crucial for a writer.

- **Genre and Market Definition:** Family histories typically fall under the umbrella of nonfiction, more specifically in the genres of biography, autobiography, memoir, or history. Understanding how your book fits into these categories can help you target the right readers and publishers. If you are writing your family history primarily for your family members and friends, this is less important to know.
- **Market Size:** The market for family histories isn't as large as mainstream genres like thrillers or romance, but there is a dedicated and passionate readership interested in personal histories and genealogy. Furthermore, there is growing interest in narratives that highlight diverse experiences, underserved communities, or untold histories. This isn't a concern if your book is meant only for family members and friends and not mainstream audiences.
- **Publishing Options:** Traditional publishing can be challenging for family histories unless your story has a broad appeal or unique selling point. Self-publishing offers a more direct route to getting your book into the hands of readers. It gives you more control over the process and profits, though it also requires more effort for marketing and distribution. Another popular option is to work with a local or specialty publisher interested in the specific context or region your family history represents. To find such publishers, you could start by checking with local historical societies or libraries to see if they can recommend any. You might also consider attending local writers' events, where you can meet representatives from these publishers. Finally, you can do an online search for publishers who specialize in your topic or region.

- **Readership:** Understanding who your readers might be is crucial. If your book is largely personal and intended for your descendants or relatives, your approach might be different than if you aim to reach readers interested in a particular time period, region, or experience that your family history encapsulates.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Unless you have a traditionally published book with a large publishing house, the responsibility of marketing will fall on you. Use social media, blogs, local community groups, genealogy societies, and libraries to promote your book. Offering talks or workshops on genealogy can also be a good way to attract interest.
- **Competition and Differentiation:** Look at other family histories or similar books and identify what makes your story unique. What does your book offer that others don't. Understanding this will help you position your book in the market if you plan to approach a traditional publisher.
- **Professional Associations:** Consider joining associations like the Association of Professional Genealogists or local historical societies. These organizations can provide resources, networks, and potential marketing opportunities.

Remember, while it's useful to understand the marketplace, the process of writing a family history is often its own reward. You are preserving a legacy for future generations and that's a priceless endeavor.

Q&A

Question: "An editor told me to cross-reference information for accuracy. What does that mean and how do I do it?"

Answer: Here are several things you can do to cross-reference material and make sure your facts are accurate.

- **Identify Your Sources:** Once you have the information that needs to be verified, you'll want to find reliable sources that can provide the same or similar information. These can be books, academic papers, trusted websites, and official statistics.
- **Compare the Information:** Read through the material in these other sources and compare it with your original information. Look for any discrepancies in facts, figures, or interpretations.
- **Record Your Findings:** Make note of where the information was corroborated or where it differed. This can be useful for referencing and citation later on.
- **Resolve Discrepancies:** If there are differences in the information between sources, try to understand why. Is it due to the source being outdated, an error, or different methodologies? If you can't resolve the discrepancy, it may be best not to use the information until you can verify its accuracy.
- **Cite Your Sources:** After you have cross-referenced and verified the information, remember to appropriately cite these sources in your work. This gives credit to the original authors and allows others to verify your work if needed.

Question: "I am writing my family's history but am getting flak from one of my family members. She doesn't want the family's history to be told. What should I do? The rest of the family members are all onboard."

Answer: Sometimes family members have things to hide or know of sensitive material they don't want shared with others. Sometimes, a person

may try to shut down the entire project. Here are some steps you can take as the writer:

- **Acknowledge Their Concerns:** Members may have valid concerns that you haven't considered or past issues or personal matters they don't want you to make public. Listen to their concerns with judgement and honor their wishes.
- **Communicate Openly:** Talk with family members, expressing why you believe the project is important and what value it could have for your family. If they're worried about privacy, explain how the information will be used and who will have access to it.
- **Offer Some Control:** Offer dissenting family members the chance to tell their story in their own way. Give them the opportunity to voice their concerns. Allow them to approve anything you write. If the family member doesn't want to be included in the story, respect their decision.
- **Seek a Compromise:** If the family member is not opposed to the entire project, just certain elements of it, try to find a middle ground that allows the project to go forward, and, at the same time, honoring their decision.
- **Proceed Without Them:** If a compromise can't be reached, proceed with writing the family history, and leave them out of it. Remember, one objective of writing a family story is not to stir up conflict, but to unite the family, remember shared experiences, and honor the family members and history. Ideally, it should be a respectful process. At times, it may be wise to postpone or cancel the project rather than face legal repercussions. While family stories are important, maintaining the health of the family's relationships with each other is also important. Ultimately, though, you must follow God's guidance and write the story He has called you to write.

What Editors Wish Writers Knew: Accurate Information

Traditional book publishers trust the author to check, evaluate, and verify all information sources that appear in the family history book. They want you to know that not all websites and online sources are credible, and to choose only those reputable sites to do research. Also, they know that not all information is equally reliable. Always consider where the information came from, who created it, and what potential biases or errors it might contain.

To ensure accuracy, editors expect authors to cross-reference multiple sources of information. If two independent sources agree on a particular fact, that fact is most likely to be true. Do further research on any informational discrepancies you find.

When most of the information, stories, and historical events for family history books come from other relatives and friends, it is extremely important to check the accuracy of dates, times, places, and events. Never trust the memory of a family member or friend. They may mean well but memories are not always accurate. Just check it out and document it in writing.

Stay Savvy

Writing a family history can be an enriching journey, but as with anything that involves financial transactions, access to personal information, and reliance on third-party services, it's important to stay aware of potential scams or misleading practices.

Here are some tips to stay savvy:

- **Protect Personal and Family Information:** Be mindful of the information you share, particularly online. While some details may be necessary for your research (like sharing names and dates on genealogy sites), avoid sharing sensitive personal information like social security numbers, bank details, etc.
- **Verify Sources and Services:** Before using a service, buying a product, or accepting information as fact, conduct a thorough background check. For genealogical services, check reviews and credibility. For information, try to cross-verify with other sources.
- **Be Cautious with “Pay-to-Access” Information:** Many legitimate genealogical sites charge for access to their records, but some scams may charge for access to information that is freely available elsewhere. Do your research to make sure you’re not paying for something you could get for free.
- **Be Skeptical of Unsolicited Contacts:** If you are contacted out of the blue by someone claiming to be a distant relative or by a company offering to publish your book, be skeptical. It might be a scam.
- **Use Secure Payment Methods:** When making payments (for publishing, accessing records, etc.), use secure payment methods that offer protection, such as credit cards or secure payment platforms. Avoid wire transfers or money orders.
- **Understand Publishing Contracts:** If you’re working with a publisher, make sure you understand the terms of your contract. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Consider having a lawyer review the contract.
- **Avoid Vanity Presses:** Be wary of publishers who ask you to pay large sums to have your book published. While self-publishing does require some investment sometimes (as with hybrid publishers), a publisher who is charging you thousands of dollars might be taking advantage.

- **Trust Your Gut:** If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Don't be rushed into a decision, especially when it involves your personal information or money.

Remember, it's okay to take your time, ask for credentials, and do your own independent research before committing to a service or payment. Your family history is a valuable treasure—take the steps to protect it and yourself.

August's Template: Writing a Theme-Based Family Story

Writing a family history in a theme-based format can help provide structure and organization to your story, keeping readers engaged and making the material more digestible. Themes could be anything from a focus on military service, migration, traditions, occupations, or education to a focus on certain values that have been passed down.

Here's a possible template:

- **Introduction**
 - Present the theme that you've chosen for your family history.
 - Explain why this theme is significant to your family and what it represents.
- **Family Origins Related to the Theme**
 - Discuss how your family's origins intersect with the chosen theme.

- Share relevant anecdotes or facts about your ancestors that relate to the theme.
- **Notable Ancestors and Their Influence on the Theme**
 - Identify specific ancestors who had a major impact on your family's story within the chosen theme.
 - Detail their contributions and how their actions or experiences have shaped the family.
- **The Theme Through Generations**
 - Take each generation and discuss how the theme evolved during their time.
 - Mention any major events that affected your family and how they related to the theme.
- **Personal Experiences**
 - Share your own experiences or the experiences of immediate family members regarding the theme.
 - Discuss how these experiences have shaped your understanding of your family and its history.
- **Present Status and Looking to the Future**
 - Discuss how the theme manifests in your family today.
 - Share any future hopes or expectations for how the theme may continue to evolve in the next generation.

- **Conclusion**

- Summarize the main points of the family history.
- Reflect on what writing this history and exploring the theme has taught you about your family and yourself.

- **Appendices**

- Include family trees, photographs, maps, or copies of important documents that supplement your narrative.

- **Bibliography/References**

- If applicable, list the sources you've used to research your family history.

- **Index**

- If the history is long and detailed, an index of names and places can help readers navigate the text.

Remember, this template is flexible. You can adjust it to suit your needs and the specific story you're telling.

Advice from Our Writers:

Teresa Newton-Terres

Teresa Newton-Terres is the award-winning author of *Mystery of the Marie*, a memoir of how her childhood tragedy surfaced a Cold War secret.

Teresa's memoir began as a project to solve what happened to her father and the shipwrecked Marie in 1960. She served students in her hometown at the University of California at Santa Barbara for ten years before she fell in love with an officer and a gentleman. Then, a love affair serving people and projects became her passion as they moved between posts. Her writing career began as a side-gig to her project career as she submitted short-stories and book-proposals that generated rejections from agents and traditional publishers. While discouraged, she didn't give up.

Her writing draws from experiences with wooden boats, buildings, boxes and beeswax along with the loss of a father at a young age, a *hard* short marriage, an *easy* long marriage, and being a matriarch of a blended family because her retired-soldier-husband died in her arms at peace with God.

Driven by shipwreck anniversaries, she created under her consulting business: TNT-press a division of Project-TNT, LLC. Teresa enlisted contract editors and a literary lawyer, and she used Lightning Source, a print-on-demand service, to publish *Mystery of the Marie*.

The journey transformed her life's purpose as she discovered that "Everything belongs to God, and I can only be a responsible steward of my talents, treasures, and trials."

Teresa is working to gain traction at www.MysteryoftheMarie.com

Teresa's Suggestions for Researching and Writing Family Stories and Histories

Just imagine—a baby crawls, walks, then runs. In the same way, you can trust God to evolve your writing of family stories and histories as you gather data, prioritize priorities, and develop capabilities.

For example, consider my memoir, the *Mystery of the Marie*.

After I received a dusty scrapbook, I was ambivalent with its contents as long submerged memories surfaced from when I was two years old because my father disappeared as one of seven in a wooden boat conducting an underwater science test. In an attempt to understand that story, I typed up the news.

Later, I created an art-piece attempting to visually tell the story.

Then, I began journaling because unresolved emotions surfaced.

“Interview people,” encouraged a historian-mentor.

Therefore, I interviewed those with a story thread—family-by-blood and family-by-circumstance in government, education, and industry.

My THREE key-interview-questions became:

- What was your experience?
- What did you observe?
- What were your lessons learned?

“Get original sources,” said my historian-mentor, so I conducted research in National and Military Archives.

I had data filling books, binders, and boxes. And I became overwhelmed and frustrated as I also wrestled with the tsunami of memories, myths, facts, and theories until my heart sunk. *What happened?*

“Prioritize priorities,” a still small voice whispered. “Give me the wheel.” Thus, I released control to our Heavenly Father, God.

My FOUR key-prioritizing-questions became:

- What do you have-to-have?
- What do you hope-to-have?
- What can you live-with-later?
- What do you NOT want?

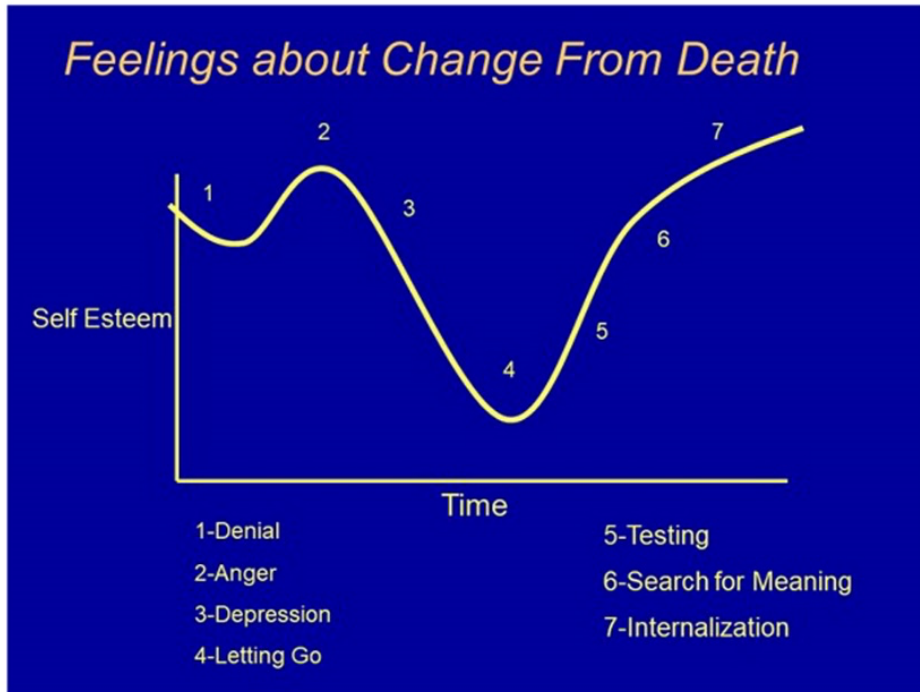
Focused, I began to write. But my pen went in circles until I searched for a ghostwriter.

Instead, God led me to a writing coach. "Lesson one," they said. "Like movies, visualize a scene; then, write that scene."

I continued to develop my capabilities.

ONE key tool became:

- A graphic tool served to show a flow of feelings about change from death as Kubler-Ross originally identified as grief: Denial, Anger, Depression, Letting Go, Testing, Search for Meaning, Internalization. Like a map, navigating grief served my relationships, interviews, and writing.



Today, the story that evolved from a scrapbook is an award-winning book.

Therefore, a suggestion to you is:

1. Collect data.
2. Prioritize priorities.
3. Develop your capabilities.

In the process of researching and writing your family stories, include those who can encourage your progress just as we cheer on a child as they learn to crawl, walk, and run. Ultimately, trust God to evolve your writing because it's your legacy and HIS-STORY.

~ Teresa

***P.S.: An Exercise:** Use the graphic above and consider the flow of feelings in this "How To." Then, consider your story.*

Thank you, Teresa, for sharing your invaluable insights!

Looking Ahead: Writing Articles for Future Events

Writers must always be looking ahead, searching for those significant anniversaries, scheduled events, observances, happenings, and holidays that will grab the world's undivided attention.

Here are some great writing opportunities just around the corner:

For online magazines: Online magazines and newspapers can get your work published much more quickly than print magazines.

Here are some ideas for your online articles for August 2023 and September 2023:

August 2023

- August 6, 1945: 78th anniversary of the U.S. dropping an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, during WWII
- August 14, 1945: 78th anniversary of V-J Day, when Japan surrendered in WWII, effectively ending the war
- August 24, AD 79: 1944th anniversary of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, burying the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum

- August 28, 1963: 60th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr. delivering his “I have a Dream” speech during the March on Washington

September 2023

- September 1, 1939: 84th anniversary of Germany’s invasion of Poland, marking the start of WWII
- September 5: Labor Day in the United States, a federal holiday honoring the American labor movement
- September 10-12: Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year
- September 11, 2001: 22nd anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the U.S

For print magazines, query the editor of a print magazine at least ten to twelve months ahead of publication time.

Here are some ideas for your print articles for August 2024 and September 2024:

August 2024

- August 19: World Humanitarian Day, as recognized by the United Nations
- August 26: Women’s Equality Day in the U.S.

September 2024

- September 2: Labor Day in the U.S.
- September 8: International Literacy Day, as recognized by the United Nations

- September 15-October 15: Hispanic Heritage Month begins in the U.S.
- September 15, 1963: 61st anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama
- September 21: International Day of Peace, as recognized by the United Nations
- September 22, 1862: 162nd anniversary of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issuing the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves in rebel territories to be set free

What's Ahead

New Course: August 2023

On August 16, be on the lookout for this month's brand-new course, **"Writing Your Family Story."** In this course, you'll learn everything you need to know to chronicle your family story for generations to come.

And remember ... this new course is included with your course membership!

If you're currently a \$7/month subscriber and would like access to all of our online courses, you can upgrade your subscription at any time. In your online Account, use the coupon code FIFTY when you upgrade to take \$50 off every month!

Email us at christianwritersforlife@gmail.com if you need help with your plan.

Helpful Writing Courses

We have so many additional courses that will help you as you write your family story!

Consider adding the following courses to your list:

- “Traditional Publishing”
- “Writing Narrative Nonfiction”
- “Book Collaboration”
- “Memoir Writing Magic”
- “Effective Story Crafting”
- “Book Beginnings That Hook”
- “Book Endings That Satisfy”
- “Conquering Writer’s Block”
- “Believing in Yourself as a Writer”

All of these courses, and so many more, are included with your course membership.

Weekly Group Coaching Calls

Great news, CWFL Course Members and Monthly Subscribers! Your membership includes our **weekly Group Coaching Calls!**

We offer two options each week, both hosted by Rebecca George:

Mondays at 6:00 PM Central and Wednesdays at 12:00 PM Central.

You can attend one or both meetings each week!

These Group Coaching Calls are designed to help you personalize what you've learned in our Monthly Digest and our fantastic writing courses, and for you to receive guidance on your own writing projects.

If you have a question best suited for Denise George to answer, bring it to our Coaching Call and Rebecca will report back with her answer next time.

Also, if you're unavailable to attend the Coaching Call live, you can watch the recorded replay. Feel free to submit questions ahead of time via email (christianwritersforlife@gmail.com).

When you're ready to join each Coaching Call, click the link below (these are the links you'll use every week):

Mondays at 6:00 PM Central

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81316875348...>

Wednesday at 12:00 PM Central

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88602685801...>

We look forward to seeing you there!

Previous Issues of the CWFL Monthly Digest

If you missed our July 2023 Monthly Digest on **writing and selling devotions**, you can find it at <https://christianwritersforlife.com/monthly-resources/>

Our Prayer for You

Father, thank you for family, those special people you put into our lives to encourage, help, support, and pray for us. Thank you for those loved ones who introduced us to you, who guided us along the way to understanding faith, who read to us from your Word, who demonstrated the examples of living a life in Jesus. Show us how to honor them and the legacies they left us. We thank you for family, our own Lois and Eunice loved ones.

And Father, in those instances when our family has been a source of pain, we thank you for working in our lives to bring beauty from ashes. Thank you for being a faithful Heavenly Father.

In Jesus' name, Amen.