

Stories from the Shed:

Connecting Communities, Histories and Legacies

A Guide for Storytellers as part of the 'Stories from the Shed' project



This publication is from the series: *'Stories from the Shed'*, as part of a project funded by the Mount Gravatt Men's Shed, and the *Queensland Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors*, via an Age-Friendly grant 2019-2020, and is aimed at developing connections between people and groups in the community.



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Introduction

This resource has been created to complement and support the use of the *Stories from the Shed* collection of personal stories written by members of the *Mount Gravatt Men's Shed*.

A significant goal of the *Stories from the Shed* is to document and share the notable and diverse lived experiences and lessons in life accumulated recalled by members of the *Mount Gravatt Men's Shed* community. Taking the form of personal memoirs, anecdotes, and biographies, they are reflective in nature and provide a useful stimulus for examining this form of personal writing.

The stories also provide a valuable opportunity to engage with the stories and experiences of members of the local Brisbane community. These stories may resonate, develop understanding, or foster readers making connections between the ideas, experiences and lessons of the storyteller and those of themselves, families or other people in their own lives.

Personal and biographical writing can include a number of text types and allows writers to develop their own style - an authorial voice. Memoirs, of varying length, are a common form of biographical writing and one through which storytellers can develop their own voice as a writer, as well as exercise critical reflective skills.

In appropriate contexts, the sharing or the collaboration in writing and editing of these texts can also contribute to a community. There are internet guides around writing memoirs. Further detail about language and communication choices appropriate to personal/biographical writing is also provided in the Curriculum resource document as part of this program.

The school curriculum document is separately available and includes Selected Content Descriptions from the Australian Curriculum in English and may be used to target learning experiences.

'Stories from the Shed' Writers Group project

Hello Fellow MGMS Shedders,

Thank you to those members who have nominated to tell your stories as part of the **Writers Group project**, until the grant funds have to be finalised. We are working our way around contact with you to develop your stories as part of the project.

What does the project look like? Well, it simply tells the stories that people have wanted to tell about their own lives and experiences. It can also be that others encourage you to tell stories they have heard and enjoyed, and believe you should make them available for others. We will not always be here to continue the personal telling. Our world may be poorer if some stories are lost.

Some stories are very brief and usually tell a tale around an incident in life that was sometimes unexpected, and often have an ironic or humorous twist to them. The sort we often tell over a coffee break around the shed and other places.

Some tales are longer and relate a life story that sometimes even the family are unaware of in any detail, and perhaps you want them to know about. In some cases people have already recorded their life and family story for family members, and highlights can be extracted to make a tale of about 20 minutes in the telling, or 3000-4000 words in written form.

The stories are printed for access by shed members. They are also available electronically from the Shed website. Story-tellers may also get both print and electronic copies for their own use for adding to themselves or by other family members or persons.

Photos often enhance personal stories, if available, and copies submitted can also be stored electronically, sometimes by photographing a print photograph, and added to stories and personal electronic storage. If not your own photos, please ensure you have copyright clearance to publish them and can verify that.

We invite you to take a bit of time to appreciate some of our efforts so far. The first collection of stories assembled are attached as a pdf file. One is a collection of tales of varying length and subjects. The others are individual life histories. Through this you can learn more about the authors, and see the scope of the project and its work.

You might even consider being part of the project with your own stories. If so, please contact us through the secretary@mtgravattmensshed.org.au

Exemplar ‘Stories from the Shed’

The following stories may be found on

www.mtgravattmensshed.org.au/mgms/index.php/writersgroup

and have been referred to as exemplar tales to show the range of diverse stories currently gathered as part of the ‘*Stories from the Shed*’ project undertaken by the Writers Group.

The stories show that it’s not a one-size-fits-all approach to story-telling. Rather, it illustrates the varying backgrounds and story-telling for different purposes that exist in our membership.

We have included stories with various types of topics and varying lengths as follows:

1. Akeroyd, Lloyd (2020) ***Around the world with a motorcycle in 1971***
 - **Story-teller’s** cultural background: **Canadian-Australian**
 - **Categories:** Urban/Rural, Maritime, Recreation/Work, Coming of age, Travel
 - This is a story of about 20 minutes telling, that describes what Lloyd got up to in his youth and that made him less insular in his world-view. It should resonate with readers who also set off to explore the world at different times, or rode motorbikes on tour.
2. O’Neill, Paul (2020) ***Growing up in the 50s-60s***
 - **Story-teller’s** cultural background: **Australian**
 - **Categories:** Urban, Life-style
 - Paul’s story of his growing up in Tarragindi is well-told with personal anecdotes giving life to his describing of a time and place many of us remember, and which no longer exists in many places.

3. Wilson, Andrew (2020) ***Memories of ships***
 - **Story-teller's** cultural background: **Australian**
 - **Categories:** Urban, Maritime, Work, Travel
 - Andrew's story reveals an insider view of working in the shipping industry in days gone by. It includes some dangers which are now on the public record, and one not so publicised regarding a potential harbour explosion.

4. Tvede, Kim (2020) ***Why I don't ride horses***
 - **Story-teller's** cultural background: **Danish-Australian**
 - **Categories:** Rural, Travel, Unexpected outcomes
 - Kim's story shows how a 'townie' ends up in three horse-related incidents that had unexpected outcomes. Sometimes one just has to laugh at what life throws at us and we fortunately usually survive to tell the tale.

5. Schneidewin, Kevin (2020) ***Kevin's story - Goondiwindi 1966-1970***
 - **Story-teller's** cultural background: **Australian**
 - **Categories:** Rural/Urban, Life-style
 - Kevin paints a great picture of his early working life in rural Goondiwindi. He describes the activities, characters and relationships of the community in a humorous and direct way that also reveals some insights into the way smaller communities function.

6. O'Neill, Paul (2020) ***Behind the Bar***
 - **Story-teller's** cultural background: **Australian**
 - **Categories:** Rural/Urban, Humorous, Life-style
 - This story of Paul's pub-work in rural south-east Queensland has both humorous anecdotes and a description of what went on behind the scenes that adds to our recollections of what life was like in days gone by.

7. John Pietilo (2020) ***When speaking only English is the way to go***
- **Story-teller's** cultural background: Finnish Australian
 - **Categories:** Travel, Migrant, Humorous, Serendipitous event
 - This short story is one we might share over a cup of coffee. It shows what can happen when overseas.

Five life history stories show how differently they can be presented.

- **Kerry Bradford** was the first to show us that an interesting life story can be told in brief, if one organises the structure well.
- **John Westwood's** tales are interesting in showing how simple events can bring about significant awareness and life changes.
- **Poul Tvede's** story shows how a twenty page story can be condensed down to a few pages with a focus on relating a couple of tales of one period of one's working life.
- **Kim Tvede's** story looked a lot like Poul's story, until John Westwood gave feedback that pictures and including more situational feelings might enhance the story, even though it increased the length.
- **Wayne Hansen's** story shows how a chronology of experiences can condense into a series of short stories, each entertaining in their own right, while charting the history of transport infrastructure development around Queensland. Wayne is also blessed with a brilliant cartooning skill that he puts to good use.

See what you think of the efforts of our first group of writers, and consider how you might tell your stories.

Kim Tvede

Introduction for MGMS story-teller involvement

Hello Fellow Story-tellers,

Thank you for nominating to be part of the MGMS project to develop a series of *'Stories from the Shed'*.

Timelines

The project writers team has worked on around a dozen stories and **different formats** to develop what we believe is achievable within the **timeline** allocated to us by the grant.

Our own efforts should be recorded in terms of **time** and **activity** undertaken so we can list this for an 'in-kind' cost consideration as part of the grant. For example, our experience shows a 3000 word story collected by interview, transcription and editing can take between 9 and 27 hours. A **cost matrix form** for recording this is available and should be used by both the *story-teller* and *interviewer/editor*.

About story-telling

People tell stories for all sorts of reasons, and generally it enhances communication and fellowship between tellers and listeners. This project seeks to develop that.

Story-tellers have a **personal style**, usually, and this project does not seek to standardise the structure of a personal story, and as much as possible, the written story should usually reflect the teller's words and approach to their story.

The **topic and length** of a story can vary between story-tellers, but a story that goes much beyond a twenty minute (or 3000 words) telling may need to be a couple of separate tales rather than one.

However, in **writing** a story-teller's tale, the immediate human feedback is not possible, so the story-teller cannot see when a bit of a story needs expanding to better give a **picture** of what is being spoken about, and when the teller needs to move on in order to keep **interest**. Humour helps, as does an interesting scenario.

A **structured** and flowing *telling* and *writing* style with short paragraphs and mostly shorter sentences that '*show*' a verbal picture of the '**When, Where, What and Who**' can help, as can pictures.

Links between the listener and reader, who may not have experience of the setting of the story, can be helped by the story-teller showing how they felt at the time.

Shared **human emotions and reactions** to a story's situation can help improve understanding and empathy through explaining, briefly usually, the '**Why and How**' someone **felt**, and not just the '*telling*' of the incident or event.

Some stories can go on to be part of a **larger project** for individual story-tellers and their families. This project also recognises that. The story will be available to the story-teller in a format, usually a **word-processing** file, that can be **edited** and **added to** by the story-teller or others later.

How do we gather the personal stories

The *Story-teller* nominates whether they intend to contribute a **personal life history** sort of story, or an **incident or event story** they may have told before, but sometimes not. The important thing is that they have a story they believe they want to '*come out*'.

Usually, the *Story-teller* starts by preparing a set of dot-points or list of **key aspects** of their story that they can speak or write to in order to give the story some **structure** and reduce incidences of **meandering** off the story

thread. Remember there is no listener in a written story to tell you when you have wandered off-topic.

Then the *Story-teller* and *Interviewer/coordinator/editor* negotiate how the story will be recorded. Generally, this has been in one of three ways:

1. At an agreed time allowing about an hour of time, the *Interviewer* and the *Story-teller* have a lead-in discussion that also includes agreement and familiarisation with any electronic recording being done. This is followed by the interviewer listening and making brief notes while the *Story-teller* tells their tale.
 - a. With the recording still 'on' the *Interviewer* then follows the story with a series of prompts that encourage the *Story-teller* to expand/recall/explain some aspects of their story. Don't be surprised if you are asked seemingly innocuous detail like, "What was the weather like?" or, "How did you feel about that?" That can be to get you to think more deeply about the situation and come out with more authentic detail, or simply to build a clearer visualisation and understanding of the situation.
 - b. When you both agree you have exhausted the details needed for the story, the *Interviewer* takes the material away for **processing** through transcription, editing, and returning a **draft** to you for further consideration, and perhaps more detail now that you have it in print before you. You may choose to add **pictures**, if you have them, to enhance the reader's appreciation of the tale.
 - c. Once the *Story-teller* agrees the text of the tale is as it should be, and any photos made available in digital form (often just by

photographing on a mobile telephone and then emailing them so the attached file can be downloaded for editor insertion).

d. Follow-up contact may continue with the *project team persons* that take on the production work of the story for project publication.

2. This format generally suits folk who are **reflective thinkers** and like time to consider what they will say. At an agreed time allowing about an hour of time, the *Interviewer* and the *Story-teller* have a lead-in discussion that also includes agreement and familiarisation on what sort of story is to be undertaken, topics, access, and steps to achieve the story in print format.

With some outline of the project story formats referred to above, and consideration of exemplar stories already done, the *Story-teller* agrees to work on producing written tale using a word-processing format, usually MS Word.

a. The editing and development that follows is usually a variation on the steps above.

3. The *Story-teller* has a **story already written**, and adapts it to the format of the project. This is done in consultation with the *project team contact persons*.

a. The editing and development that follows is usually a variation on the steps above.

Publication

Once ready for publication and permissions recorded and filed, the draft document gets prepared for final publication and a final supervisory edit-check.

Files used in preparing the document will be collated into an electronic folder and presented to the Story-teller for their personal use and sharing with family and others as they wish. They may also wish to extend the project personally with, for instance, other family member stories.

It is anticipated the document will be available for print distribution with copies for the story-teller and Shed, as well as possibly promotional work with other community groups and schools.

A copy is also anticipated to be available on the MGMS website for access by MGMS members, families, and the wider community.

1124 words – Kim Tvede. April, 2020

Family histories, telling tales, writing memoirs

Writing a personal history usually implies some sort of chronological sequence of significant events. Such writings often find their way into family histories where the life story is written by someone else, and may include significant events such as birth, marriage, children, work, retirement, locations and in the case of past family members, their death details. These may then branch out into the lives of siblings and descendants. Sometimes they include photographs of people, places and other historical records that fit the stories.

Telling tales are different to writing histories. When we tell tales they usually address incidents involving ourselves and/or other people we have associations with. There is usually a theme to the story, but the incident may stand alone or be a reference to a particular time and place, or activity. The tale has a *beginning* and *end*, involves triggering emotions such as *humour*, or some other *affect*, and often in some ways takes a gentle dig at the protagonists in the story. We sometimes quote speech directly, and usually select highlights to keep the story short, but describe *feelings* so as to keep the listener relating personally to the topic of the event.

Writing memoirs is a more open process than recording a history. We don't have to stick to chronology, in fact you can start in the *middle* or *aftermath* of a story, and work out from there and link the various *events* and *themes* as the tale unfolds. You may even link a series of tales around a central theme.

One of our members started telling three stories with the *ending*, then the *beginning*, and lastly the *middle*. It was captivating, waiting to hear how the tales unfolded and arrived at the conclusion first told. This technique to keep interest and attention and making the listener work for the story can be powerful.

Writing memoirs is usually a more **concise style** of story. It's the story we tell, cut down and refined so as to keep the reader interested, anticipating the twist in the tale, and linking the story-teller's emotional involvement in a situation to the listeners own feelings and life experiences.

If **recording your memoir-style stories** is what you are interested in, or if you want to tell such stories as you have probably told before and have them more permanently recorded for the future or a wider audience, the *Writers Group* project may be able to help. Talk to, or email us through the *MGMS secretary*.

Our attention has been drawn to a **free on-line course** on writing memoirs, but which we cannot reproduce without permission due to copyright. It can be found at:

<https://www.theoldie.co.uk/blog/the-oldie-memoir-writing-course-free>

About copyright

We have information from people in the Shed who have been down the copyright road that:

1. If you create the story, you own the copyright. You can transfer it or sell it to another entity. In our '*Stories from the Shed*' case, the originators, being each of our individual story-tellers, will retain the copyright. The Men's Shed is funding the project for charitable and community purposes and ownership would not be permitted.
2. We understand that, when anyone uses copyrighted material as part of their story, they need to acknowledge source, and if required under Australia's *Copyright Act 1968* legislation and amendments, have the permission of the copyright owner to use the material. Generally material from before 1955 is treated differently to any material from that time forward.
3. When a document is published on-line, it is relatively simple for a reader to copy text. An example of this may be when family members use a Story-tellers story to create further family stories, or when students and educators use copied text as part of educational activities. It is a requirement that the person using text in this way acknowledge source. Hence, the requirement for academic texts and assignments to have proper reference and bibliographic details. It may be that schools would appreciate the opportunity to use '*Stories from the Shed*' as a source as part of their programs. To do this, they need to know, in a simple and responsive way, the conditions under which they have permission to do so.
4. The cover page on '*Stories from the Shed*' publications has a statement about copyright, and generally this allows open-access if not for

commercial use, unless the author specifies otherwise, in which case the statement should be amended to reflect any restrictions.

5. The '*Stories from the Shed*' copyright statement shows that any requests for permission to use copyrighted material should be made through MGMS. This should then allow such requests to be passed to the copyright owner for consideration. If you are a '*Stories from the Shed*' story-teller, it may be prudent to let others know of your conditions of permission in the event you cannot be contacted regarding such requests for any reason.

Dealing with sensitive issues

Memories are often strongly linked through **emotions**. Some emotions are very strongly tied to **incidents**. In any case, the **emotional impact** is often part of why we **remember** the experience so well.

Sometimes those **emotions** can be **negative** and link to things like bullying, oppression, power-imbalances, and physical or emotional pain. They can link to particular incidents and experiences, certain people and sometimes, generalised periods of life.

Sometimes we feel better for having **shared** the experiences with **trusted** other people, and sometimes we seek to bury the incidents and feelings so they only surface subconsciously, but **sometimes**, just sometimes, they form part of a lived experience that makes understanding a story being told more complete. How do we deal with that when we are not sure who will hear or see the story?

Generally, when we tell such **sensitive aspects** of our lives, we **filter** the story depending on who is receiving the story. Sometimes we may want our families, or particular people, to know what influenced some aspect of our lives. The story they receive, for whatever reason, may be more detailed than that told around a coffee break with a myriad of listeners, or in '*Stories from the Shed*'. Sometimes stories need to be **differently told**, depending on the **audience**.

Sometimes we **remember** a person or people very clearly. Sometimes we could give information for an identikit **description**, even after decades, and even more often, we strongly and clearly remember the **full names** of the people involved. Identifying them can be easy. But we need to be clear about what we are doing and why if we don't want to attract **negative attention** to ourselves that may have us revisit experiences we usually really don't want to relive more than we have to.

We need to recognise that stories with **strong emotional aspects** are often also strongly **influenced** by how we **perceived** the situation. Often we see a **'them' and 'us'** dimension to a situation. We need to recognise that the *'them'* folk may recall the situation differently.

In the end, we usually really give a more powerful story when we focus on the **'I' dimension** of ourselves. After all, we are often most sure of how we felt about a situation, and less certain about others. Since we are telling the story, we can relate most powerfully by sketching the situation, and then focussing on how it had us, ourselves, feeling, and not dwelling on the *'others'*.

A listener or reader who has **not shared the experience** and may not fully understand the context, has, however, more often **felt the emotions** you describe, even if in a different context. That can sometimes lead to people **sharing their stories** around the common theme of the shared emotions.

Stronger links, and thus stronger story-telling, may more frequently come through shared feelings and understandings than detailed descriptions of situations and particular people.

What ways can we relate a negative situation given all the above issues. Some suggestions are:

- You might remember the **full name** of a person who adversely affected you very well, but does everyone need to be exposed to that? Can you just use a **first name**, or if that is still too identifiable, can you advise you are using a **false name** to avoid any further aggravation from telling the story? Will doing this detract from the value of your story? After all, **it's your story, not theirs. Talk about you and how you felt**, not the detail of them and what they were doing so much.

- If the story is about people part of a group, and they are easily **identifiable through context**, is that information already verified and in the public domain, for instance, through legal or *Royal Commission* reports in the public domain, can you **sketch the issues** and then **focus on your 'I' statements** of your perceptions and feelings? That is your story, not someone else's story.
- Sometimes it is **entertaining** to relate some of the times **we made errors and learned through them**. Depending on the errors, and depending also on the outcomes, we might apply a filter on how much we say.
- At the end of the day, talking about things that sometimes **hurt us can be good for us**, but we are **not obliged to bare our souls**, nor **castigate others**, just in the name of telling a good story. Be judicious, and think about the possible effects of the telling, then work out how you tell your story.
- Lastly, and this goes without saying usually, if you have experience in something that included **signing away your rights of disclosure** and requiring you to not reveal some information without particular approval, sometimes even to legal officers, remember that, and be prudent.

Kim Tvede. May, 2020

Voice-to-text recording

There are a number of ways that non-typists can record their stories. The simplest way is to be interviewed and the interview recorded. The interviewer or another person with typing skills can then produce a transcript for editing and proofreading, This is labour-intensive, expensive if those skills need to be paid for, and involves others.

If you have a typing speed of 25 words-per-minute or better, typing, even from recordings, may be a viable option for you. A page of A4 at 12pt text at around 700 words should take around forty-five minutes to an hour.

Voice-to-text software

Technology can sometimes help. There are various voice-to-text computer and smart-phone applications that the story-teller can use to record their voice and have the software application convert this to text.

Voice-to-text applications have various levels of accuracy, and can be dependent on the clarity of the speech of the story-teller. Speaking to scripts or notes rather than free-speaking can improve accuracy and grammar and thus reduce editing time considerably.

If one has access to a software application that can be trained to improve recognition the recording procedure can be enhanced.

The more professional systems often have a tutorial embedded within the system so you can learn how to best use it.

Dragon Naturally Speaking - Professional

MGMS has two laptops with *Dragon-Naturally-Speaking-Professional* installed on them. They work best with a mic headset.

It has a tutorial option within the software. Allow a few hours to work through the basics, and have a notebook to make notes on the options you can use.

MS Word 365

If you are using *MS Word 365*, it has a voice-to-text option usually available on the right side of the tool-bar. It seems to work quite well. Your file is entered directly into MSWord format ready for saving and editing, which is useful.

Freeware for smart phone: Voice Notebook

A free smart-phone downloadable voice-to-text application called *VOICE NOTEBOOK* has been used by MGMS story-tellers with some success. MGMS member Kevin Schneidewin prepared the following notes on how he uses it.

1. *Voice Notebook* should be set up for *EN-AU* language
2. The three dots after *EN-AU* allow you to set a new note number. I find this handy to separate each recording session I do.
3. I tend to record for around 15 minutes, but that is entirely up to you, I just find it easier to break up the sessions.
4. The three bars at the top-left give access to '*send*' so that you can email yourself to transfer the text to your mail computer.
5. The text you receive will be a *HTML* file which you cannot edit. It is therefore necessary to '*copy*' the email and '*paste*' to a blank Word file. This automatically gives you your recorded text able to be saved in '*.docx*' format which can now be edited.
6. You can then have fun fixing any transcription error and embellishing the story if necessary.

7. The best thing about this method is that most of the typing is done for you. But you still need to correct text errors, and format much of the punctuation and paragraphing.

There may be another voice-to-text application available within your smart-phone options. Some of them need permissions to access parts of your phone that you may need to think about before granting permission.

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