

## **‘Stories from the Shed’: Writing 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 listener's 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>