The First Ten Steps to Writing a Memoir

Jo Parfitt

1. Write a journal. "Write when you are bleeding," they say, go back to edit it when the scab has formed and only polish it once the wound has healed. Pouring your heart and soul into a journal account, written freely and without censorship will provide the compost you need for your final manuscript.

2. Learn how to write compelling stories that leap off the page, stories that readers can really picture, containing characters that are plausible. To do this we recommend learning to write with **SPICE**, the tool **Jo Parfitt** devised to help you remember the five elements you need here. **SPICE** stands for **Specifics**, **Place**, **Incident**, **Character** and **Emotion**. If you want to find out more about this you can find Jo's workbook, ***Write Your Life Stories*** for sale in all online bookstores.

3. Write a list of stand-out stories. A memoir is a string of stories, written as scenes, each with **SPICE**, that is strung together. Consider the stories to be pearls that are strung onto the narrative of the book, like a necklace.

4. Consider your book's themes. A good memoir will have a handful of themes that run right through the book and that appear regularly. Themes could be loneliness, rejection, trying to find a job, looking for love, food, art and so on.

5. Find the jeopardy. For a memoir to be compelling it needs to present a problem early on that needs to be solved by the end of the book. Sometimes new problems will appear along the way but they too need resolution.

6. Find the plot. A memoir might be what happened to you but the reader is only interested in the parts of your story that are relevant to the central story arc or plot. If a story does not fit your plot, cut it.

7. Don't include everything just because it happened. Again, if it does not fit the plot it needs to go.

8. Find your voice. The more you write, the more you journal, the more your natural writer's voice will emerge. Don't force it, let it come.

9. Get feedback. You need to find out from other people whether your book works or not, so join a writers' circle, hire an editor and get feedback. Find out what works and what doesn't.

10. Know that your first draft is what New York Times bestselling author, Anne Lamott, calls a Shitty First Draft. Write the complete draft first without going back to edit along the way. Only once you have the complete draft can you go back to the beginning again and start editing.

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