

Write Your Life Story

Impact of Place

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Modified from:

Telling the Stories of Life Through Guided Autobiography by James E Birren, Ph.D. and Kathryn N. Cochran

Writing your Legacy: The Step-by-Step Guide to Crafting Your Life Story by Richard Campbell M.Ed. and Cheryl Svensson, Ph.D.

Below are a series of questions to jog memory and to focus writing a theme about the impact of place on your life—it's impact on your life as a child, how it shaped you as a person, and how it impacted your decisions about where to live as an adult. You don't need to answer each question. Nor do you need to answer questions literally the way you wrote answers to essay questions or reading comprehension questions in school. Just read through the questions and decide what would be interesting and meaningful for you to write about in terms of the impact of place on your life and who you became.

As you write your theme, weave in your age and where you were living at the time to help readers understand the context of your experience. Also reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of the events at the

time and now that you're looking back. Are they the same, different, or a mix?

Finally, try to relate your story in two to four pages—with double spacing and a twelve-point font that's about 500 to 1,000 words. Remember writing is about selection: Selecting memories, selecting specific words, and selecting details relevant to your theme. The limitation on the number of pages will force you to choose the most relevant aspects of your experiences. And that will create a sharp focus for your story. You can always expand the story later. Initially, it's important to convey the most essential aspects of how place impacted you.

On the Move or Rooted in Place

How many different places did you live before you left home? Was your family a military family that moved frequently or was your family one that lived in the same place during your childhood and adolescence?

How did moving frequently or being rooted to a place impact your approach to relationships in general and close friendships in particular?

How did moving frequently or being rooted in place influence your thoughts and feelings about change as a child and then as an adult?

How did the Climate and the Landscape where you grew up shape your life?

Growing up did you live on top of a mountain, or close to the ocean, a river or lake? Did you live in the desert, on the flat plains, or amidst rolling hills and deciduous trees that changed with the seasons?

What was the climate? Dry? Long winters with tall mounds of snow and freezing temperatures? Warm springs and hot summers beside the ocean? Four seasons of changing temperatures? Long seasons of rainy weather?

Where you lived and the associated climate made a difference in your lifestyle and the types of activities available to you— long snowy winters in the mountains offered skiing. Warm sunny weather near the ocean enabled you to swim and surf. Seasonal changes with shifts in the number of hours of daylight also impacted your activities and lifestyle—think about Alaska with its long hours of daylight in the summer and its long hours of dim light and darkness in the winter.

How did living in the climate and landscape where you lived impact your lifestyle as a child?

Did living in these places influence your decision about where to live as an adult?

Did you choose a similar climate and landscape or something different? What influenced your decision to live in a similar place or to move to some place entirely different? What did you gain? What did you lose?

What types of places and activities (dance lessons, horseback riding, sports parks, museums) were available to you?

What were your favorite places to go?

Your favorite activities? And why?

What special memories do you have of places you visited in your neighborhood or within a few hours drive? What made these places special? Did they influence where you chose to live as an adult?

Close to Relatives or Far Away?

Did your family live close to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins? Or did your relatives live far away in different states or countries.

How frequently did you visit relatives? When did you visit and what did you do on those visits? Did your relationship with relatives influence your thoughts about the type of family you wanted to have as an adult?

Neighborhood

Did you live in the city, the suburbs, or the country? How did living in the city, suburbs, or country impact your lifestyle as a child?

What were the benefits of where you lived? What were the drawbacks of where you lived?

How did the lifestyle with its benefits and drawbacks shape your life and your relationships as a child? How did it shape who you became? For example, living in the city there may have been many children to play with, but no

opportunity to go hiking or fishing. Living in the country there may have been fewer children to play with, fewer opportunities to visit museums and theatres, but lots of opportunities for hiking and fishing.

How did living in your neighborhood impact the school you attended?

Were there long bus rides in the morning and afternoon to get to and from school?

Was the school well equipped with new textbooks and audio-visual equipment or poorly equipped?

What were the teachers like: Did they have high expectations or minimal expectations? Were they creative in presenting information and projects or did they rely on rote memorization and worksheets? Were they caring and concerned about their students?

Were there special events in your neighborhood such as hayrides in the fall or arts and crafts festivals in the summer? Do you have any special memories of these seasonal and annual events?

Did you go to the neighborhood public school, to a religious school, or to a private secular school? How did that experience shape you?