

Write Your Life Story

Turning Point Theme

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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.

Turning points are events, experiences, or insights that change the direction of your life, change how you see yourself, shift your ideas about how you want to live your life, and sometimes, dramatically alter your beliefs and worldview. They manifest themselves in different ways:

Many life-changing events are part of life's familiar developmental milestones that bring joy, but also a degree of disorientation as your lifestyle shifts to accommodate new circumstances: graduating from school, adjusting to a first job, marriage, birth of a child.

Other turning points are small, quiet, and unexpected. They may arise from a single event, such as going to the library and discovering a quilting group that offers new friendships or a book that changes your

perspective on food, lifestyle, work, marriage, or parenting. Sometimes, they may represent the accumulation of experiences over many years, until one day you realize you need to make significant changes in your life.

Turning points can also be events that significantly alter relationships and daily routines such as divorce, changes in financial status (for better or worse), a move to a new place, or a change in school (think middle school to high school).

And, of course, ***turning points can be those major life events that challenge your beliefs and your sense of safety and security:*** death of a significant person in your life, serious debilitating injury from a car accident, sudden, serious illness for you or someone significant in your life, loss of your home and possessions in a natural disaster such as flood, fire, hurricane, or earthquake, or a national or international crisis such as war or major economic depression.

Below I've presented a series of questions for each type of turning point.

At this stage, you will be writing only one turning point story. You don't need to write something about each type of turning point or each question. Nor do you need to answer questions literally in the manner you responded

to essay questions or reading comprehension questions in school. Just read through the questions for each type of turning point and decide what would be interesting and meaningful for you to write about for your turning point theme.

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 are 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 turning point experience. 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 a life-changing experience.

Turning Point Theme Questions

Developmental Milestones as Turning Points

Think about the major developmental milestones in your life: birth, starting school, graduating from school, first job, marriage, children, first house, deciding on your life work, retirement.

What developmental milestone(s) in your life significantly altered life as you had known it?

Was there a period of “limbo” in which you had no idea of what to do next? For example, did you graduate from college with a degree in history, but discover you had no idea what companies or agencies hired history majors? Did your children go off to college within the space of a couple years leaving an empty nest and confusion about how you wanted to live your life?

Did you find yourself in unknown territory having to learn new skills and coping techniques? For example, were you overwhelmed with the birth of your first child, because despite reading all the books, so many things happened that

weren't in the books? Did you move from the country to the city or vice versa and need to develop new routines?

Was there a major shift in your relationships?

When you entered high school did you gravitate to sports while your closest friends became involved in theatre productions? When you married were your close friends still single? Did you struggle with how to maintain these important relationships?

Small, Quiet, Unexpected Turning Points

Did you have a period in which experiences accumulated that compelled you to make different decisions about the path you would take in life?

Was there a chance meeting with someone who became a mentor or a friend for life that supported or altered your life journey?

Was there a book or activity that in retrospect was a life-changing experience?

Significant Life Events that Altered Daily Routines and Relationships:

Did your parents' divorce?

How did that impact your relationship with each parent? What impact did it have on you at the time? Looking back how do you think it influenced your ideas about marriage, relationships, and life in general?

Did your family move while you were a child or an adolescent?

Did your family move from the city to the country or from the country to the city? Was your family a military family? How did the move reshape daily life, school, and relationships with peers? How did it influence your thoughts and feelings about change?

Were there any events in your childhood or adolescence that significantly impacted your family's finances?

Did your parents receive a substantial inheritance? Did one or both of your parents receive significant promotions that increased income? Was there an economic depression or recession? Did one of your parents lose a job because a company

downsized or went bankrupt? How did the change reshape what you bought, where you went, and how you celebrated special occasions? Did this financial shift change your life? How did it impact your thoughts about money?

Major Life Events that Threatened Safety and Security

Some turning points challenge your beliefs and your sense of safety and security: death of a significant person in your life, serious debilitating injury from a car accident, sudden, serious illness for you or someone significant in your life, or loss of your home and possessions in a natural disaster such as flood, fire, hurricane, or earthquake.

Was there a major event in your life that threatened safety and security?

How did this event change daily life and relationships?

What were your thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of the event at the time and now that you are looking back?

Who and what supported you during this crisis?

How did this crisis shape you as a person—your view of yourself, others, the world, and life in general?

How did it change the direction of your life?

How did family members and friends react to this event?

How did it change those close to you?