

## Write Your Life Story

### *Work Life 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.

Below are a series of questions to jog memory and to focus writing a theme about your work life. 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 your work life.

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 you choose your life work as well as how it shaped you and the direction of your life.

### **First Jobs**

What was your first job? Did you decide to work or were there economic factors, parental expectations, or a school program that prompted you to make this decision?

What did you learn about work life in your first jobs?

Did you learn something about the type of job that suited your strengths and interests?

Did you learn that certain jobs were problematic because they required tasks that were antithetical to your personality and temperament—such as sales for an introvert or long hours of paperwork for an extrovert?

Did these early work experiences impact choices you made about your life work?

What did you learn about relating to bosses and coworkers? What did you learn about the rhythm and routines of working such as having to get up early in the morning, being on time, and having only a specific amount of time for lunch? Did your lifestyle change. For example, not being able to stay out late on week days?

What did you learn about work environments? For example, did you come to understand that you disliked working in office cubicles or working outside in the heat and cold? Did you discover you liked working with machines, or numbers better than people or did you discover that you enjoyed working with people more than with machines or numbers?

## **Choosing Your Life Work**

Were there school subjects or after school activities that interested you and set the stage for what you would choose as your life work?

Were there people in your family or other adults who were role models or mentors who influenced your decision?

What other factors contributed to choosing your life work?

Did you have a choice in your life work, or did economic factors, parental expectations, or some other factors result in your choice of your life's work?

Were there many possible occupations you were interested in and felt possible or only one or two?

Did the place where you lived or the historical time in which you lived influence your occupational choice?

If you had a choice in your life work, what about it interested you? What strengths did you bring to this work?

What were the primary benefits and rewards of this life work? The primary challenges? The primary drawbacks?

## **Changing Careers**

Did you change careers as an adult? If so, what were the circumstances?

Were there massive layoffs or a “glut” in the market in your occupation such as the aerospace engineers and teachers in the 1970s?

Did you experience “burn out” in your initial career?

Did you find that over time there wasn’t sufficient challenge in your work after you had mastered the basics?

Did you gradually lose interest in your work as other interests began to absorb you? Did you reach a point where you knew you needed to make a change?

