

WRITING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR DISCUSSION¹

An autobiography is an intensely personal recollection, the nature of which will differ from writer to writer. There is no “correct” way to write a memoir. It may assist you, however, to consult this guide of suggested topic areas when considering how to begin and how to focus your recollections.

Do not feel you have to use this guide or follow it completely.

It is not intended that you write this memoir as a question and answer document addressing the topics set out below. The best autobiographies are first and foremost stories. Infuse into your memoir the life you have led and the experiences that are important to you. Give the memoir whatever focus and emphasis you believe best characterizes your story. You may only want to write about an aspect of your career or you may want to address its full range and span.

This is your project, your recollection, your opportunity to reflect on your career and the role you played in your community. Above all, have fun! This should be a challenging, but enjoyable project.

The Law Society Archives will benefit from your stories, for each is part of the rich history of the legal profession in Ontario, which dates back to 1797.

POSSIBLE TOPICS AREAS TO GUIDE YOU

GENERAL

- Family origins: ancestors, parents’ backgrounds, siblings, politics, occupations, household, meals, religion, leisure
- Childhood and youth: leisure, summer and part-time work, elementary and high school, university
- Relationships, children

CAREER

Decision to become a lawyer/education

- Recollections of how and when you decided to become a lawyer
- Did you face any barriers to becoming a lawyer?

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- Influences on the decision
- Reflections on the choices made
- Legal education; articling
- Nature of your educational experience; relationship with principal and firm
- Experience attending Osgoode Hall (as the law school)

Type of practice

- Choice of law
- Choice of practice structure
- Why those choices?
- Did you remain in the same practice structure throughout your career -- or did you change? (private practice, government, other; small firm/large firm)
- What were the challenges your practice structure or area of practice presented?
- How did practice change over the decades of your career?
- Did you use your legal education to work in a field other than private practice? How did your legal background assist you?
- If you were not in private practice, why did you choose another type of legal job? (e.g. education; government)

Physical Nature of your Practice

- Type and location of office
- Support staff
- Equipment and Technology
- Costs of running the practice – how did that change?

Clients

- Who were your clients? (individuals, businesses, government, legally aided clients)

- Did you serve a particular demographic community?
- What did you observe about your clients over the years? How do you think they viewed you? How did they view the legal profession generally? Was it satisfying to represent them?
- If you were in government, how did the nature of that work, or the way you were instructed, change over the years?

Professional and Other Associations

- To what professional and other associations did you belong?
- Were these important to your career; to your life? How?

Context in which you practised

- How did the state of the world affect your practice/work decisions at various times? (e.g. war, depression, changing societal values, changing community structures)
- Did you experience any specific challenges to your right to work as a lawyer?

Image of the Legal Profession

- How has the image of the legal profession changed since you began practising law?
- Has it been important to you to be a member of a self-regulating profession?

COMMUNITY

- Describe the place in which you practised. (urban/rural/smaller city)
- How has it changed over the years?
- What was the role of lawyers in the life of the city/town/community?
- How has that changed over the years?
- Do you have a sense of what role lawyers will play in the community in the future?

REFLECTIONS

- What has being a lawyer meant to you?

- When you retired, or as you think about retiring, what are the images that come to mind about your years as a lawyer?
- What were your most memorable files/cases? Why?
- What were the things you liked most about being a lawyer and about practice?
- What were the things you liked least about being a lawyer and about practice?
- What has your being a lawyer meant to your family?

RECORDS

- Do you have any photographs from your legal careers? Any awards? Memorabilia?
- Have you written anything before this? Do you still have a copy?
- Would you be interested in discussing donating material to the Law Society's archives?