

## Saskatchewan Remembers

### WRITE YOUR LIFE STORY!

The following list of topics and questions may be helpful if you are interested in writing your life story. They are designed to prompt you to think about different aspects of your life. Not all of them will necessarily apply to your life and undoubtedly you will think of other ones to add as you begin your work. Feel free to change the order of topics to suit your particular story. If you are writing your life story (pen and paper), you might find it useful to organize your stories in a loose-leaf binder so that you can keep separate headings and move the writings as needed. If you are using a computer, you can create documents based on the headings and store them all in a special folder.

#### **Your Mother's Family**

- o Who were they?
- o When did they come to Canada?
- o Where was your mother born? When?
- o Where did she grow up and go to school?
- o What kinds of things did she aspire toward?
- o What sorts of interests did she have?
- o What kind of employment did she have?
- o Describe her character, including any sayings or proverbs you might remember.
- o What was her philosophy of life?
- o Describe the times in which she lived (even briefly).
- o Describe any relatives you remember, including physical appearances, occupations and interests.
- o What special family customs, skills, talents and traditions did they have?

#### ***Teachers and Rec. Therapists***

These questions can be used to record someone's life story. Consider teaming seniors with students to record life stories on tape, mini-disk, video or computer & microphone using a free recording program such as Audacity.

#### **Your Father's Family (Same questions as above)**

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## Your Birth

- o When were you born and where?
- o Describe the circumstances of your birth according to any recollections made by your family.
- o What was happening locally, provincially or nationally when you were born?
- o What events occurred on the day of your birth?  
(Looking up the newspaper published on your birth date will help.)

## Your Home

- o How did your parents meet? When?
- o When did they marry?
- o Where did they live when they first got married?
- o Recount any anecdotes about their early married life.
- o What kind of work did your father do?
- o Did your mother work outside the home?
- o How many brothers and sisters did you have? Who are they?
- o When were they born?
- o Describe any special qualities of your siblings.
- o Do you feel your sibling order had an important effect on your family life?
- o Add any anecdotes and family stories.

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## Your Early Childhood

- o What is the earliest thing that you can remember?
- o What was your mother tongue and culture?
- o What were your favourite nursery rhymes or bedtime stories?
- o Did you have any imaginary playmates or special daydreams?
- o How important was religious belief at this time?
- o Describe how your family celebrated holidays.
- o What was your favourite food?
- o What kinds of foods did your parents cook?
- o Describe your favourite toys and clothes.
- o When did you first start helping with chores?
- o Describe your early chores.
- o What hobbies did you have?
- o What did you do in the evenings?
- o Describe your relationships with aunts, uncles and cousins.
- o Did you have a pet?
- o Do you remember the first house you lived in? How about the second house, or other places?
- o How many times did you move? How did you feel about moving?
- o If you were not born in Canada, what are your earliest memories of this country?
- o Describe any historical events in the community or province that you witnessed as a child.

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## Early School Days

- o What are the first thoughts you can remember regarding school?
- o When did you start? How old were you?
- o Describe the first school you attended.
- o What did you wear on the first day?
- o How did you feel on the first day?
- o How did you get to school?
- o Who was your first teacher? What were your initial impressions of him or her?  
Did these impressions change?
- o Who were your friends?
- o What kinds of books did you use? What was your favourite library book?
- o What was your favourite subject? How about your least favourite one?
- o How did you spend recess and lunch hour?
- o Favourite lunches?
- o Describe any Christmas concerts you can remember.
- o Add any humorous, interesting or unusual anecdotes about your school days.
- o What did you do during summer vacation?
- o What times were the most fun in school?
- o What was disappointing?

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## Teen and High School Years

- o How do you think society changed from the time you were a child until the time you were a teenager?
- o Describe any historical events (locally or provincially) that you experienced.
- o What was happening in Canada at this time? Internationally?
- o Were there any major changes in your own family's way of life?
- o have important modern conveniences by this period?
- o Did you have a concept of being a "teen" as compared to that experienced by teens in recent decades?
- o What was expected of you as you grew older?
- o Were there any special celebrations of any birthdays or other important events in your life?
- o What were your favourite past-times?
- o Your favourite clothes? How did you wear your hair?
- o Describe social events in which you took part. What did you enjoy doing?
- o Who were your friends?
- o Any interesting or humorous events you can recall about these years?
- o What were your professional goals at this time?
- o Favourite books or movies?
- o Did you go to high school?
- o What was your first impression of high school?
- o What teachers influenced you most in these years?
- o Where did you live when you attended high school?

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## Higher Education

- o Did you choose the lifestyle/career that you had wanted in your younger years?
- o How did you feel about leaving home?
- o What was your first impression of your institution of higher learning?
- o Where did you live?
- o What were your favourite subjects, professors, or instructors?
- o Who were your close friends?
- o What were you wearing? Describe your hair-style at that time.
- o Any new hobbies or interests?
- o Did you win any awards or scholarships?
- o What was your philosophy of life then?

## Career

- o Can you recall applying for your first job?
- o What did you wear for your job interview?
- o Describe your first job, the tasks expected and wages received.
- o What did you buy with your first wages?
- o Describe a typical work day.
- o What was your pay?
- o Where did you live at that time?
- o What other jobs followed?
- o What jobs were the most rewarding?
- o What aspects of a job did you most enjoy?
- o Special colleagues?
- o Any anecdotes arising from work?

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## Courtship, Marriage. Commitment

- o Describe your very first "date" or whatever you called it at the time.
- o Where did people meet in your community?
- o Where did you go on dates?
- o Did you attend local dances?
- o When and where did you meet your future spouse or partner?
- o When did you realize you were in love?
- o Did you get engaged? Where?
- o How did your families react? Interact?
- o How did you decide the date of your wedding?
- o What were your partner roles as you understood them?  
Were they like others at the time?
- o Did these roles change during your life?

## Your Wedding

- o How did you plan your wedding or other celebration?
- o Did you have a shower or bachelor party?
- o Describe the events of your wedding. (Date, location, clergy, attendants, clothing, guests, memories of the reception, gifts you received.)
- o Did you go on a honeymoon?
- o Relate any anecdotes about the wedding and honeymoon you might recall.
- o What happened in the world the day of your wedding?  
(Check the appropriate back issue of a newspaper for this.)

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## Early Relationship

- o What was the most difficult part of being together?
- o What were your happiest moments then?
- o How did you resolve any disagreements?
- o What qualities did you admire most in your spouse or partner then?
- o Did you have a budget? Did you manage on it?
- o What helped you the most during the early years of being together?
- o Did you have any serious illnesses, economic difficulties or other problems in these years?
- o What special memories of those years do you have?
- o What advice would you give a person contemplating marriage today?

## Starting a Family

- o Were you prepared to become a parent?
- o What kind of a parent did you want to be to your children?
- o How did you feel when you found out a child was on the way?
- o How did you tell your spouse or partner?
- o How did you prepare for the baby's arrival?
- o Did you have any pregnancy complications?
- o Describe the circumstances of your child's birth.
- o How did you choose his or her name?
- o How long did you convalesce after the birth?
- o Describe seeing your baby for the first time.
- o What changes did the baby bring to your household?
- o What did you most enjoy about being a new parent? Difficult moments?
- o Describe any special clothes or gifts received.

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- o Any anecdotes or special memories?

### Family Grows

(Review all of the relevant questions in the previous section and answer in relation to the birth of additional children.)

- o How was the arrival of your next child different from the first (or the others)?
- o How did your oldest child or children react?

### Raising a Family

- o Describe the places and houses in which you lived as the family grew.
- o Did you try to save money? How?
- o What chores did your children have to do?
- o List your children's favourite games, past-times and foods.
- o Describe any memorable clothing in the family.
- o What memorable things did your children say?
- o Describe: holiday celebrations, family birthdays, vacations, vehicles, special friends, pets.
- o Relate any family traditions...cultural, unique, comical, etc.
- o What did you think was most important for children to learn as they were growing up?

### Religious Activities

- o Describe your earliest religious experience and particular impressions.
- o Record any childhood prayers learned.
- o Did you have a special prayer area in your home?
- o What places of worship did you attend?
- o Describe any memorable religious leaders or religious members.
- o How important is your faith in relation to the rest of your life?

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- o List important religious dates (baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals) and where the rite occurred. How did you feel at this time?  
(Write about these times in detail if you wish.)

### **Clubs and Organizations**

- o To what clubs, groups or organizations did you and your family belong?
- o Did you help to found any of them?
- o Any important club activities?
- o Special friends made?
- o Have you met or known any "famous" social, political or religious leaders personally? Any anecdotes?
- o Any stories of people helping others in a major way?

### **Retirement**

- o What did retirement mean to you before you retired? After you retired?
- o When did you retire? What adjustments have you had to make after retirement?  
What are its chief benefits?
- o Have you developed any hobbies or special interests?
- o What do you look forward to doing in the years ahead?

### **Accomplishments and Goals**

- o What have been your three most important accomplishments in life?  
How did they come about?
- o What do you consider to be an outstanding talent, ability, craft or skill that you have?
- o Describe any creative endeavours in which you have been involved: music, literature, arts, inventions, etc.
- o What advice would you have for a young person who is developing goals and skills?

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## Highlights and Special Thoughts

- o What was the most difficult time of your life?
- o How did you deal with it?
- o If you had to live through it again, what changes would you make?
- o What was the best time of your life? What made it so?
- o What was one of the funniest things that ever happened to you?
- o Who have been your best friends over the years?
- o What makes for a lasting friendship?
- o Who made the most profound impression on you through the years?
- o What were their outstanding qualities?
- o What do you most admire in your spouse or partner today?
- o What do you consider a favourite book, movie or play today?
- o List any proverbs or sayings that have helped you over the years.
- o What has been your "formula for living?"

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### APPENDICES—THINGS YOU CAN ADD

#### ***Appendix I: More Family History***

(more detail; genealogical info.)

#### ***Appendix II: Photographs***

#### ***Appendix III: Favourites I Want to Share***

(recipes, patterns, directions for building birdhouses, etc.)

#### ***Appendix IV: My Heirloom List***

(items, sentimental or otherwise, that you value)

#### ***Appendix V: Things I Forgot to Say***

(sounds unusual, but you'll be surprised how creative you can be here)

**When your life story is written, consider preserving a copy of it in an archives. Wondering which one? The Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists can help you find a home for your story for future generations to enjoy.**

**Contact the Council at [outreach-scaa@shaw.ca](mailto:outreach-scaa@shaw.ca) and we will help you!**

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### START OR JOIN A WRITERS' GROUP

Repeatedly, life-story writers say how important it is to meet with other individuals engaged in the pursuit of writing. A Memory Writers' Club that meets regularly under the direction of an enthusiastic leader provides opportunities to hear excerpts from other life stories, to air bits of your story, to complete writing exercises and to share problems. Here are just a few of the benefits writers have expressed:

#### **1. "The writing assignments got me going in the first place."**

Writing exercises do not have to be profound, just stimulating. They provide a starting place for writing and a nursery for confidence-building. Knowing that fifteen people are working on the same assignment makes us less likely to lose confidence. We also learn to accept creativity in a variety of forms in others and in ourselves!

#### **2. "I stay motivated in my work."**

When writing energy lags, listening to someone else's story can give you writing ideas, for it can have many parallels to your own. Make notes as you listen and follow up later.

#### **3. "I appreciate the comments I receive concerning what I have read at the Club meetings."**

The Club is there for the support and encouragement of the budding writer, recognizing that each member is at a unique level of his or her own development. There is a strong link between word and personality: we take our words personally. In a group setting, the warmth of constructive commentary and deserved praise stimulates growth, but criticism is a frost that can kill initiative instantly. Listen constructively. Respond with caution.

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### **4. "The Club has helped me iron out problems in content and style."**

A story is read. Then the leader attempts to point out what made that piece of writing interesting or praiseworthy. Using the "good example" method, writers can learn from each other. One of the hardest tasks is to write an opening line for your story and its ending. It is very educational to observe what others have done within the writing group. Their creativity will give you many leads.

### **5. "The writing circle keeps me in touch with the latest articles and books on lifewriting."**

In a Club, everyone stays on the alert for items of relevance to life story writing, and a list of books and articles naturally grows.

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### HOW TO SPROUT A MEMORY WRITERS CLUB

Stay on the watch for a writing class offered in a community college calendar, University extension programme, or a short course at the Seniors' Centre. By enrolling in the class, you will meet many others interested in life story writing. Or, consider posting a sign in your Seniors' residence that indicates your interest in starting a group. When you have few people, find a spot and start!

Perhaps a core group of the writers can be encouraged to continue meeting after the course ends. In some cases, course lecturers may volunteer to handle the club programme or perhaps he or she can suggest a suitable leader.

Remember: your purpose is to write. Try not to get sidetracked by an extensive amount of business, the production of a glossy newsletter or planning an annual conference. A monthly gathering in someone's living room, pens and paper, and a hot cup of coffee at break-time is all you really need.

Start small. A handful of writers provide a fine inducement to personal sharing. Begin with an inspirational thought for writers, a simple writing exercise, and then open the floor to readers.

If readings are kept to a maximum of five pages or so, there will be more opportunity to hear more readings in one session. Allow some time after each reading for reflection and comment. Your programme leader might suggest various monthly themes, which will mean a bit of writing homework. Eventually, you will want to work on your personal story, chapter by chapter.

As your group grows, you might form an executive (President, Secretary, Programme Coordinator) and possibly appoint a Librarian. You could also develop a constitution that states your club purpose (mandate) and vision. In time, you might want to appoint an Archivist to care for the older club records, photographs, recordings and stories or books presented to the Club in published or unpublished form.