

Journaling When You Don't Have the Photos

As you organize your photos for your albums, you notice gaps in what you photographed. You remember events that you didn't even photograph at all—perhaps you weren't there or perhaps you were too busy.

You can ask around to find if anyone took photos you can have copies of. But what if no one has photos to record a time or a person in your life that you simply must memorialize? What to do?

Filling in the gaps

You can write a *Cameo Narrative*. These are short narrative texts—usually 50 to 150 word—that you write into your albums to tell a brief story of an event or a person or an action.

To assure it is your life and not your photos (or lack of them) that are at the core of the lifestory you record in your photo album, start with a MemoryList.

A MemoryList includes everything and anything you did, said, thought, or felt and of everything or everyone who was (or was not) present but not photographed.

Sept. 6, 1994, the fire that took my parents' house—The windows bursting from the heat, flames shooting out the windows—first on the east side and then the west—the firefighters hosing the neighbors' houses—the roof caving in—my parents watching from the other side of the street—the maples being singed—Mother saying, "The gladiola would have been so beautiful this year," ...

Get organized!

The MemoryList makes your writing easier. Why? Creating the list stimulates you to recall the many details that make writing a cinch! In compiling the list, you will also sense what to include and how to include it. For instance, remembering a

preponderance of conversation cues you to supplement your missing photos with dialog (instead of a description).

If you kept a journal or have letters or anything written (newspaper clippings?), go back to crosscheck your MemoryList with what is written down. Crosscheck too by asking others what they remember. (But do your own list first: that keeps you in contact with what is important to you!)

Once you are satisfied you have remembered as much as possible, it's time to write a Cameo Narrative. If you've ever written a caption, you can write a cameo narrative.

Writing comes easily with practice

Here are some suggestions about *how to write*:

■ **Ask yourself: "What are the most important things I want to tell about the period or persons for which I have no photos?"** Trust your intuition here. Often the first thoughts that come to mind are the most significant. Don't worry just now about style, grammar, or whether your writing's good enough. (That comes later.)

■ **Write as short or as long a piece as you want to.**

■ **Keep each cameo narrative focused on one person, idea, setting, or action.** If you want to write something else about that person or action or idea, draft a new cameo narrative.

■ **Write in short simple sentences.** Don't worry about being fancy as you put ideas and words together. Simple is often best. Keeping sentences short helps you write clearly. It's not true that complicated writing has more meaning.

The MemoryList will suggest topics to write about, but here more tips.

■ **The reason the people were together.** What impact did the event have on them? Include information about what led up to the moment. Particulars about the event, people, or setting that you wish to memorialize. You can include clothing, words, props, interesting or unusual physical features.

■ **Portraits of people.** There are two kinds: physical and character. While photos give us a person's physical appearance there may be details it does not capture. Older photos may be black and white and not reveal the color of the eyes. Photos do not

reveal much about what's going on inside someone, her character. (More on that next month)

■ **Dialogue.** Including conversation allows us to “hear” people’s voices as you once heard them. Use favorite words and expressions. Describe the voice. Favor *s/he said* over fancier words (*she chortled!*)

■ **Settings** are the environment in which people live and in which action takes place. Setting includes the place (geography, buildings) atmosphere. (mood, feelings, ethnic culture, religion, education), and the time (day, month, year, season). Describe these in detail.

You can apply these cameo narrative writing suggestions to complement photos you have on hand. Cameo narratives are great even if you have photos—you can always add to what was photographed.

You are not limited to just one cameo to replace a photo. Write as many as you want to fill the gap in your album. Incorporate these narratives on your page with the same care and attention you give photos.

Your albums need the stories of the photos that are not there—and they need the stories behind the photos that are there.

Don't stories and photos go great together!

These exercises are from
The Photo Scribe: A Writing Guide
How to Write the Stories Behind Your Photographs.

We have designed Cameo Narrative and MemoryList worksheets that make the process of using these tools a snap.



Writing Great Cameo Narratives Pad



Writing Great Memory Lists Pad