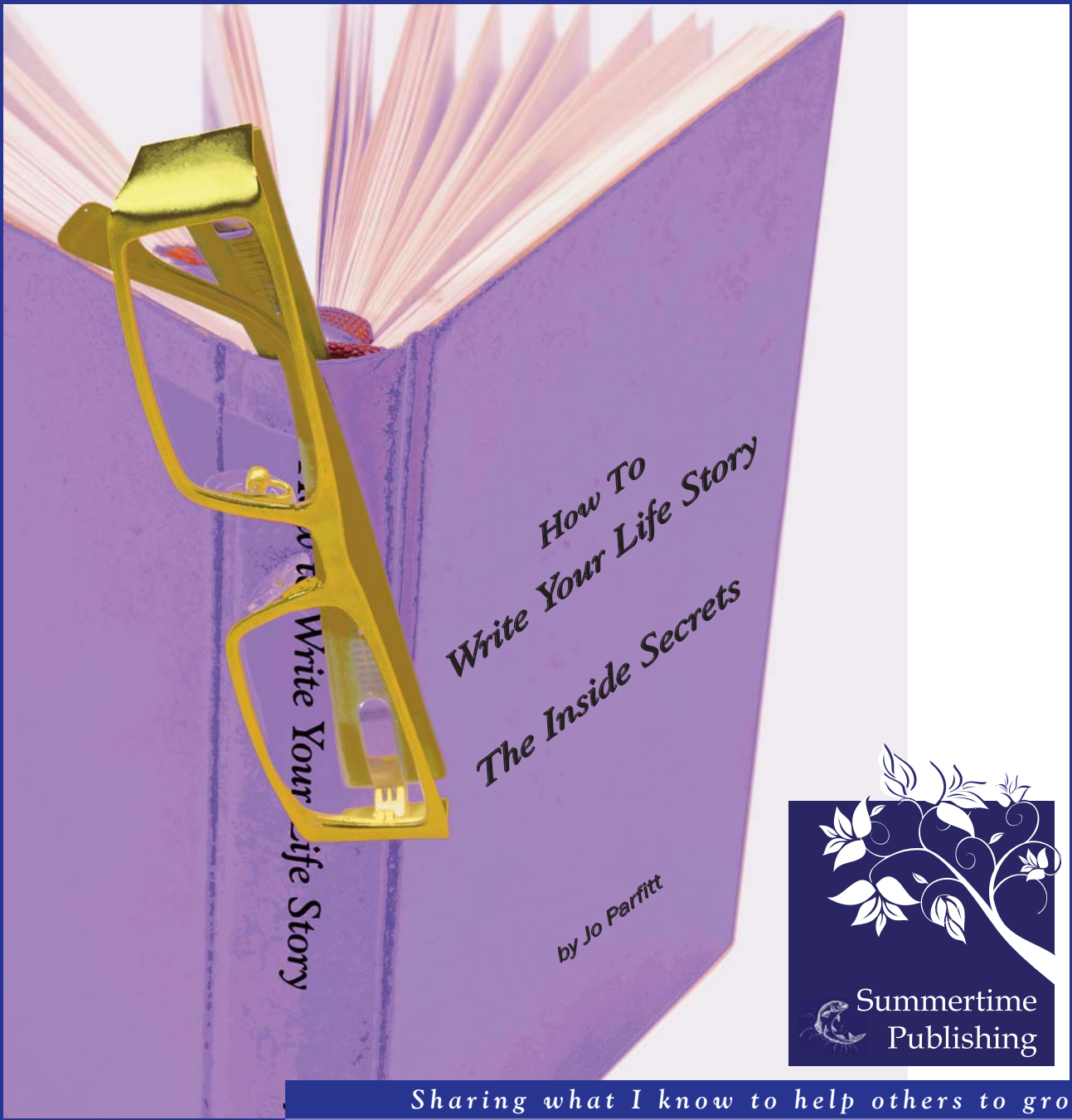
How to Write Your Life Story

The Inside Secrets

by Jo Parfitt



Sharing what I know to help others to grow

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A free report from Jo Parfitt

Want a copy for your friends?

Then send them to www.writelifestory.com today!

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Congratulations!

You have finally made the decision to start writing your life stories. That's terrific news. Now you can relax in the knowledge that all the things that have happened to you, your experiences, your learnings, the people who have influenced and shaped you, the places you have been and everything that matters to you can be preserved.

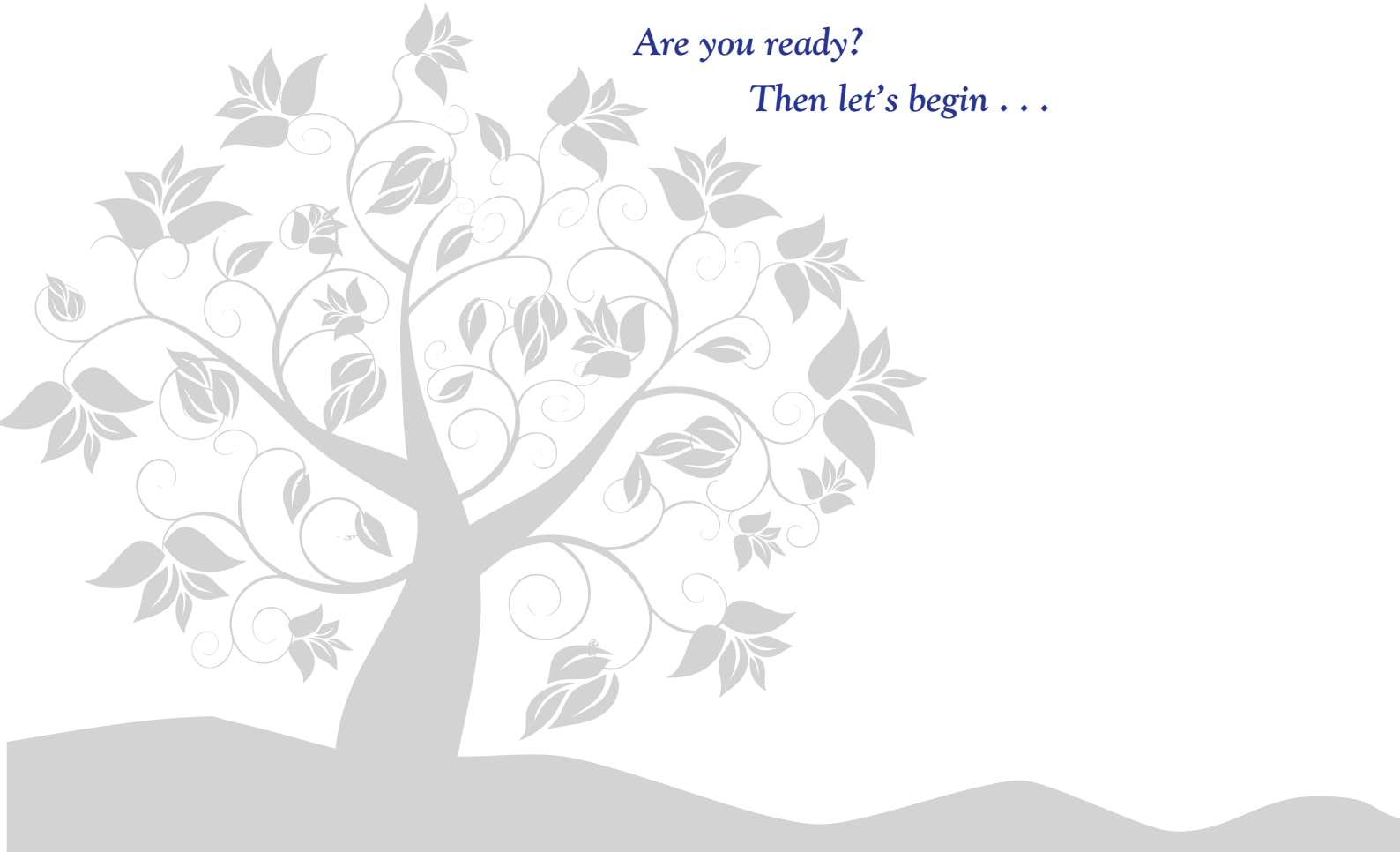
When you write your life stories you can:

- Share what you know
- Share your stories
- Ensure your knowledge does not go to waste
- Leave a legacy
- Inspire your readers
- Let your memories live again
- Start to write richer, fuller journals and accounts of your daily life

Everyone knows the importance of strong foundations. As a published writer I have made my fair share of mistakes. Now, here, I share with you the How to *Write Your Life Story – The Inside Secrets*. Now you can craft compelling stories that leap off the page. At last your stories can give your reader a glimpse of your life, let your experiences live again you help the world to begin to understand who you really are.

Are you ready?

Then let's begin . . .



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The Seven Secrets for writing life story

Secret one

Paint a picture with your pen

Your reader is not a mind reader. If you want your reader to be able to visualize the places you have been, the people you have met and imagine they are there with you in the room, then you need to paint a picture with your pen.

Describe the scene using words that evoke the setting perfectly. If you write: 'the view was breathtaking' no one will be able to see it. 'Breathtaking' does not describe what you saw. Instead, write about the trees, flowers, hills, valleys, buildings and lakes. Include their colour, texture, scent, sound or taste. Name the flowers. Help your reader to be there with you. Help your reader to see.

Secret two

Test it out

What seems funny to you and your good friends and family may not seem half so amusing to a complete stranger. So, if you plan to get your work published it is vitally important that you find out if people who do not already know that Aunty Madge is a drunk and has holes in her stockings get to know her too. It is easy to forget to include details that you know so well you take them for granted. So test your writing on other people. Get feedback. Join a writers' circle. Take a class.

The great essayist, David Sedaris, tests all his new pieces out live on an audience before he commits them to paper. If the audience doesn't laugh he cuts or changes the story.

Secret three

Don't be scared of being vulnerable

If you want your reader to understand how an experience made you feel then you need to share your emotions too. Share your joy, exasperation, sorrow or humiliation. Show your softer side. You can start to connect with a reader at a deeper level when you allow yourself to be vulnerable, when you show your weakness. Writing from a place of pain can often lead to your best writing. Make it clear how the other characters in your stories felt too.

Be honest, frank, authentic and true. Your reader will want to get inside your head and empathise with you. Your writing needs to resonate with the readers, so tell your stories warts and all.

Secret four

Show not tell

Every creative writing tutor in the world tells you this one. Rather than writing: 'Jane was angry' show her anger. Have her slamming a door or smashing a plate. Rather than telling us what someone said to you in reported speech, show us the dialogue. Show us what you said to each other and how you each reacted. Bring the scene to life.

Secret five

Remember it's a story

If you read novels or short stories you will be familiar with the elements you need in a piece of fiction to make the reader care what happens next. It is the same with life story. You need to keep the reader interested. Think about what keeps a reader page-turning in a novel and add that to your life stories. Create believable characters that interest you, a plot, good writing, dialogue and setting your scenes well. To make your life stories compelling you need to imagine you are writing your real life stories as if they were fiction.

Secret six

Introduce your characters

When someone has a name it helps you to picture them. If you include people who you refer to as 'my teacher' or 'the lady in the grocery store' it makes it hard for the reader to be able to picture them. Giving people a name makes them memorable and lets the reader imagine he knows them. If you can let the reader see your characters, hear them speak and almost feel they are in the room, then the things your characters do will be more plausible.

Secret seven

Pay attention

Start paying attention to what is going on in your life right now. Notice the shapes of the clouds in the sky, the colour of the sky, the way the wind feels on your skin. Notice the furniture in your room, the architecture in the town. Watch the birds. Listen to the traffic. Breathe in the smell of the countryside. Take life more slowly, watching, listening, smelling, tasting and feeling everything around you. Look out for the details. Watch people and notice how they move, speak, cross the road and so on. When you pay attention to the world around you it will enrich your writing and help you to add these details to the stories you write. I recommend that you start writing about your daily life right away, noticing the details. This will be a great limbering up exercise for your life story writing. Even if you only practise for ten minutes a day, this will make a big difference to the quality of your writing.

The writing tool you can put on a Post-it™ note

I am a firm believer in using mnemonics and acronyms to help me remember things. Every Good Boy Deserves Favour got me through many a sticky piano lesson and West is Best East is Least has just got me through my sailing exam! So, I was determined to find a way to help people who wanted to write their life stories to remember the vital elements they needed in order to produce compelling prose and stories that leapt off the page.

It took me months to devise my own acronym. My notebooks were filled with my ideas and crossings out. But then, one day, as I stood in the kitchen preparing to make a chicken curry, it came to me **SPICE**!

I love to cook. I have written two cookbooks and for years I have found it useful to mentor the people I help to write their own books and articles to think of their content in terms of ingredients. I even like to call the order in which you arrange those ingredients a *recipe*.

When I devised **SPICE** it was a perfect fit. Use it to **SPICE** up your writing. Sprinkle some **SPICE** in a dull dish of prose. **SPICE** adds pep and vigour. It adds life. It makes the tastebuds tingle. Without it your stories may just be boring old meat and potatoes.

So simple. Just five words. **SPICE**.

Are you ready? Here they are:

SPICE

Need a little more guidance as to what they actually mean?

I wouldn't be sticking to my motto of 'sharing what I know to help others to grow' if I didn't give you more explanation, would I?

- **S**pecifics means details, description, naming things – don't write 'flowers' write 'tulips'.
- **P**lace means you need to set the scene, using all the senses.
- **I**ncident means something needs to happen.
- **C**haracter means you need people in your stories and they need to talk and move and do things.
- **E**motion means you need to be authentic and say how people feel.

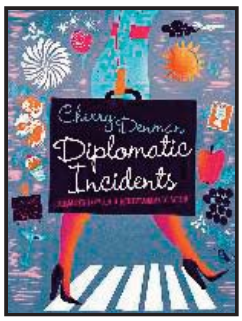
SPICE

10 inspiring case studies of people who have written their life stories and got them published

If you are serious about writing about your life then you MUST read other books that are similar to the one you want to do too. It is no good burying your head in the sand. If you want to write you have to read too.

The books selected here have been chosen for several reasons:

1. The authors have all lived abroad
2. I really like their books and keep recommending them to my clients and students
3. I know the authors
4. These books illustrate a variety of ways to write about your life
5. They are well-written and worth reading
6. The authors have used a variety of ways to reach publication



Lots of funny stories strung together in random order with each chapter according to a theme

Diplomatic Incidents

Cherry Denman

In May 2010 Cherry Denman launched her autobiography, *Diplomatic Incidents*. As the wife of a British Diplomat, Cherry has her fair share of stories of cockroaches the size of stilettos and miscommunication with the locals. Taking a theme for each chapter, she writes funny story after funny story on topics that include arriving, transport, children, visitors and so on. She is an illustrator and so each story includes her cartoons too, by the way. This was published by John Wiley.

Similar books

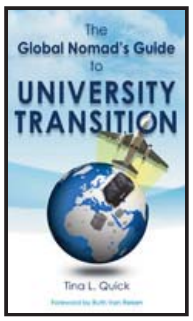
Take a look around on Amazon and you will see that other diplomatic wives have written about their experiences. Joanne Grady Huskey wrote *The Unofficial Diplomat* and Brigid Keenan wrote *Diplomatic Baggage*. If there is room for diplomat wives to write about their experiences then surely there is a place for oil wives, corporate wives, military, missionary partners. There must be a need for books by expat husbands, by husband and wife teams and of course, anyone who has moved to a new country without the financial support of a company has a story to tell too.

A chapter a month, a year abroad

Planet Germany

Cathy Dobson

Cathy Dobson has been living in a village in Germany for over 15 years now. Her book, *Planet Germany*, takes a typical year in her village and groups stories and festivals together according to the month in which they happen. Her book is filled with stories, lots of characters and dialogue, divided into 12 chapters, one for each month. Cathy self-published her book using an Internet publishing company. She is not the first person to write about a year overseas. Peter Mayle did it with *A Year in Provence* and Pam Pooley did it with *A Season Abroad*. There are many more. You don't have to take a year, you can take five years, a decade, or just the time it takes to renovate your house. However, with a finite period as the backbone for your book it can help to give you a direction.



Author's knowledge and experience make her an authority on a subject so she can write a 'how-to' book

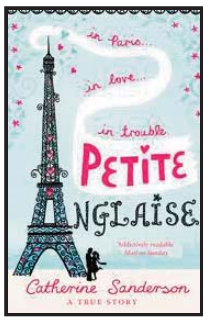
The Global Nomad's Guide to University Transition

Tina Quick

In June 2010, Tina Quick launched her book, *The Global Nomad's Guide to University Transition*. Tina has lived abroad all her life and her three daughters too followed in her footsteps. When they began to go off to college in their 'home' country of the US, Tina noticed they had a hard time adjusting. An intercultural expert herself, Quick began to specalise in helping young people who have lived abroad to cope with this transition. Weaving her own stories with those from her research and comments and practical tools from experts in the field, Tina's 300 page book will be of huge value to TCKS and their parents. If you have acquired a lot of knowledge on a certain topic, then you too could write a handbook like Tina's. Tina published hers with me through Summertime Publishing.

Similar books

Robin Pascoe has done just this with her titles: *A Moveable Marriage*, *Raising Global Nomads*, *Homeward Bound* and *A Broad Abroad*. Kathleen Smith did so with *Parents on the Move*. Stacie Berdan and C Perry Yateman did so with *Get Ahead by Going Abroad* and there are many more examples of this.



A blog becomes a book

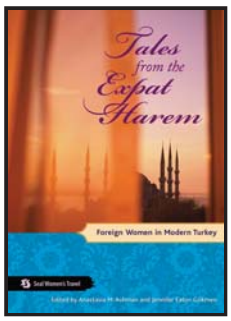
Petite Anglaise

Catherine Sanderson

Catherine Sanderson's bestselling book, *Petite Anglaise*, began as a blog that Catherine wrote to relieve her boredom in the office in Paris. Based there with her French boyfriend and their daughter, her relationship was rocky to say the least and Catherine, donning the persona Petite Anglaise, began to document her journey into finding new love and happiness in France. Her blog reached the attention of Penguin and was rewritten as a book. She has now abandoned the blog to be a novelist. This story is chronological and tells of a journey, from unhappiness to happiness by a foreign woman in France and all the things that happen to her along the way.

Similar books

Other blogs that became books include Danie Barkhouse's *The Expat Arc* and Mike Harling's *Postcards from Across the Pond*. Danie published her book through Lulu and Mike was published by Lean Marketing Press.



An anthology of writings on a theme

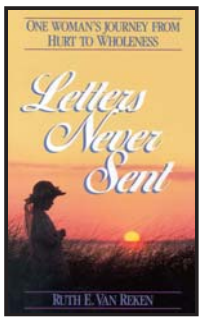
Tales from the Expat Harem

edited by Anastasia Ashman and Jennifer Gokmen

One of my favourite books on life abroad comes from these two expats who edited and compiled this collection of exquisitely written accounts by non-Turkish women who found themselves living in Turkey. The book has its own website at Expat Harem. Each story focuses on a different theme and each reveals a different slice of the reality of life there in a country that finds itself between the worlds of Arabia and Europe. This is an anthology on a focused theme. Their book was published by Seal Press.

Similar books

Anthologies are always popular and Dianne Dicks has published several including *Cupid's Wild Arrows* through her own Bergli imprint, while *Unrooted Childhoods,* published by Nicholas Brealey and Carol Allen's *They Only Laughed Later* published by Europublications do the same.



Letters from the author, chronologically placed tell her story

Letters Never Sent

Ruth van Reken

Ruth was originally commissioned to write this by a mainstream publisher when she was around 40 and had returned from a lifetime overseas. Ruth was having a hard time understanding how her experience had shaped her values and her identity and so her publisher suggested that she write a series of letters to her family as if she had written them at the time. And so she did. Beginning aged five when she went to boarding school and ending at the present time, when she had begun to find some clarity. This is an incredible, heartfelt book that makes the reader warm to the author while also stepping inside her life spent in Africa as a missionary kid and later a missionary parent herself. More recently, Ruth took back the copyright to her book and now publishes it herself, keeping a stock in her basement in Indianapolis and posting them out to purchasers. Ruth is also the co-author of *Third Culture Kids Growing Up Among Worlds*, published by Nicholas Brealey Intercultural.

Similar books

Writing in a New Convertible With the Top Down by Christi Killien and Sheila Bender shows correspondence between two great writers.

A series of funny incidents strung together chronologically

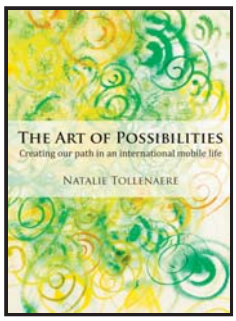
Don't Tell Mum I Work on the Rigs – she thinks I am a piano player in a whorehouse

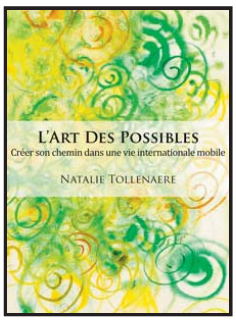
Paul Carter

This is a hilarious book, filled with the kind of toilet humour and derringdo that appeals to men, particularly those away from home, working on the rigs. Yet, Paul Carter has the ability to write stories that not only have you laughing 'til tears come out of your nose (embarrassing when it happened to me on a train) but that appeals to women and teenagers too. To write this he must have written a list of the funniest, whackiest things that had happened to him during his life until that moment (his thirties) and strung them together. The stories are so entertaining that they stand alone regardless of his plot. But then, a book must have a plot, even a true story and so we are kept turning pages as we wonder if Paul will ever settle down with the girl of his dreams and leave the rigs. This book was accepted and published by Nicholas Brealey and has been hugely successful. His second book, *This is Not a Drill*, is also out.

Similar books

Try *Oil Rig Roughneck* by Geoffrey Horn.





Author's expertise and life stories combine into a 'how-to' book

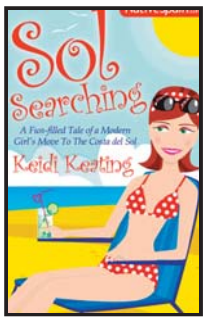
The Art of Possibilities

Natalie Tollenaere

Natalie came to me last November with the dream of writing a book that would help expatriates to explore their identity, their passions and what mattered through art. Natalie is an artist and a coach and did not consider herself to be a writer. Yet, when she sent me the first draft of what she thought would be a giveaway ebook on her site I knew she had actually written a book. Divided up into chapters focusing around an emotional issue and then offering an art exercise to help with it Natalie created an inspiring and practical guide. She tells her life stories at the start of each chapter in order to illustrate each issue. This book is beautifully written and Natalie, who is Belgian, produced two versions simultaneously, in English and French. I was delighted to publish them and thrilled that the entire process took less than three months!

Similar books

Live Your Best Life Abroad by Jeanne Heinzer, *A Portable Identity* by Debra Bryson and Charise Hoge.



Chronological story of what happened to the author

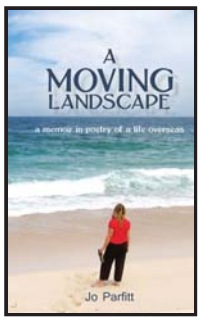
Sol Searching

Keidi Keating

When Keidi went to live on the Costa del Sol she was just 24, left behind her job and her flat in London and took a massive risk. When she arrived, and ended up staying with her parents, she found it incredibly hard to make friends, find a job and escape to her own apartment. Funny and frank, this is a chronological tale of two years or so in her life and shares the ups and downs of being young and lonely in the sun. Keidi is an amazing, resourceful young lady and so she uses a dating site to find a mate and never misses an opportunity to find work. She soon ends up running a highly successful magazine franchise, called The Sentinella and running a business helping others to get into print and promote their books via her brand The Word Queen. Keidi sold her book to Lean Marketing Press, a publisher based in Spain and the book is now sold not only via Amazon but also via her equally resourceful sister, Kami's, Spanish market stall.

Similar books

C'est La Folie by Michael Wright and *Tout Sweet: Hanging up my High Heels for a New Life in France* by Karen Wheeler.



One for luck...

Chronologically placed poetry becomes an anthology that tells a story

A Moving Landscape

OK, it's cheating to talk about my books here but I did write my memoir in 2009 so it counts. This is an anthology of my poetry written between the ages of 15 and 40 something and is an authentic and insightful account of the psychological and physical landscapes in which I found myself in England, France, Dubai, Oman, Norway and the Netherlands. Poetry is hard to place with publishers so I published it myself and it is for sale on Amazon worldwide.

Similar books

Not sure I know of any, do you?

The examples above illustrate just a few of the ways that you too could write a book about your life. These books were written by expatriates who had a story to tell. Perhaps you could do the same?

Thank you

Thank you for allowing me to share How to Write Your Life Story – the Inside Secrets with you here.

Need a little more guidance as to what they actually mean? Sure, I'll explain further, but for more detail, explanation and real life examples, you may like to consider taking my full ***Write Your Life Stories home study program***. You'll find a 100 page workbook, two hours of audio, a video and over 200 inspirational stickers compiled into eight lessons teaching you everything from how to write about people, place, humour and your childhood to how to write great dialogue and create really good stories.

There is an option to be matched with a personal tutor who will work with you on as many exercises as you want to submit and, if you opt to have all eight pieces of homework critiqued, you can also take advantage of a personal consultation by Skype or phone half way through the course.

If, at the end of the course you think your life story is worthy of being published, then, having learned and practised the rules and tools in my program, you are much more likely to have your work considered by a publisher. As a publisher myself, I get to read many manuscripts and more than 90 per cent of them get rejected simply because the author has failed to write effective stories that include **SPICE**.

Don't let that happen to you!

Interested in purchasing my program? Please click here.

With very best wishes to you and your writing dreams

Jo Parfitt

www.joparfitt.com
www.writelifestory.com