



# Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past

By *William Zinsser*

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**Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past** By William Zinsser

Written with elegance, warmth, and humor, this highly original "teaching memoir" by William Zinsser—renowned bestselling author of *On Writing Well* gives you the tools to organize and recover your past, and the confidence to believe in your life narrative. His method is to take you on a memoir of his own: 13 chapters in which he recalls dramatic, amusing, and often surprising moments in his long and varied life as a writer, editor, teacher, and traveler. Along the way, Zinsser pauses to explain the technical decisions he made as he wrote about his life. They are the same decisions you'll have to make as you write about your own life: matters of selection, condensation, focus, attitude, voice, and tone.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Zinsser, author of a classic guide for nonfiction authors, *On Writing Well*, looks back on his own years of professional writing, glossing selections from his past articles with advice for would-be memoirists. He begins with impressionistic sketches of his WWII experiences as a young army private in North Africa and Italy. Next he details his 13-year career at the *New York Herald Tribune*, where he wrote drama and movie features. He draws humorously and self-effacingly on his impromptu role as an extra for Woody Allen in *Stardust Memories*. With quietly witty insights into academic life, Zinsser charts years spent teaching at Yale while writing freelance for magazines such as *Look*. An account of his service as an editor at the Book-of-the-Month Club includes a history of that venerable institution. Finally Zinsser brings us up-to-date with his recent rebirth as a public pianist. To follow one's heart is Zinsser's most enduring piece of advice. In writing he recommends dwelling on "small, self-contained incidents" and making use of anecdotes and vivid memories. When discussing capturing places in print, he comments usefully on the changing trends of the travel genre (increased political correctness). Zinsser is warmly appreciative of other well-known memoirists and their organizational methods, admiring in particular Thoreau, Frank McCourt, Mary Karr and Annie Dillard. While his frank, affirmative and encouraging style will help anyone embarking on writing their own life story, his book will be especially useful to those of his own generation.

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### Review

"William Zinsser is a born teacher. This book, full of charm and ingenuity, cannot fail to delight and instruct the would-be writer of personal narrative."

### About the Author

WILLIAM ZINSSER is a writer, editor, teacher and musician. He began his career with the New York Herald Tribune and has since written regularly for leading magazines. His 17 books, in addition to *On Writing Well*, include *Writing to Learn*, *American Places*, *Mitchell & Ruff: An American Profile in Jazz* and *Easy to Remember: The Great American Songwriters and Their Songs*. During the 1970s he taught writing at Yale, where he was master of Branford College. His musical revue about a summer community, *What's the Point?*, was produced off Broadway in 2003. He has long taught writing at the New School, in New York, where he lives with his wife, Caroline Zinsser.

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