

The Daily Telegraph

# TIMES OF OUR LIVES

The essential companion for writing your own life story

*"Prepare for a flood of memories –  
and capture them for ever."*



MICHAEL OKE

Times of Our Lives

*This page intentionally left blank*

**The Daily Telegraph**

*Times of Our Lives*

---

**Michael Oke**

Published by How To Content,  
A division of How To Books Ltd,  
Spring Hill House, Spring Hill Road,  
Begbroke, Oxford OX5 1RX. United Kingdom.  
Tel: (01865) 375794. Fax: (01865) 379162.  
email: [info@howtobooks.co.uk](mailto:info@howtobooks.co.uk)  
<http://www.howtobooks.co.uk>

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or stored in an information retrieval system (other than for purposes of review) without the express permission of the publisher in writing.

The right of Michael Oke to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© Copyright 2004 Michael Oke

First published in paperback 2004  
Reprinted 2005  
Reprinted 2006  
First published in electronic form 2007

ISBN: 978 1 84803 141 8

Produced for How To Books by Deer Park Productions, Tavistock, Devon, UK  
Cover design by Baseline Arts Ltd, Oxford, UK  
Typesetting and design by Sparks – [www.sparks.co.uk](http://www.sparks.co.uk)

NOTE: The material contained in this book is set out in good faith for general guidance and no liability can be accepted for loss or expense incurred as a result of relying in particular circumstances on statements made in the book. The laws and regulations are complex and liable to change, and readers should check the current position with the relevant authorities before making personal arrangements.

Every effort has been made to identify and acknowledge the sources of the material quoted throughout this book. The author and publishers apologise for any errors or omissions, and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should appear in any reprint or new edition

To my darling girls Mychelle and Katie, to my wonderful parents, and to the many friends who have trusted me to assist with their life stories, without whom this book would not have been possible.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Contents

<i>How to Use This Book</i>	xiii
<b>1 Meeting the Family</b>	<b>1</b>
Making a start	1
Introducing yourself	2
Recording your family background	3
Advice for genealogists	4
Writing about parents and grandparents	6
Writing about siblings	8
Points to ponder	10
Top tips	10
<b>2 Childhood Home</b>	<b>11</b>
Describing the house	12
The kitchen	13
The power supply	16
‘Modern’ technology	17
The front room	19
The hall and stairs	20
Upstairs	21

The backyard	23
The garden	24
Wider research	25
Points to ponder	27
Top tips	27
<b>3 Neighbourhood</b>	<b>28</b>
Providing a general overview	29
Character portraits	32
The darker side of life	33
What others thought of you	34
Tapping into the senses	34
Thinking laterally	35
Animals	36
Shops	37
Money	40
Street traders	41
Dustbin collection	42
Points to ponder	44
Top tips	44
<b>4 Childhood Days</b>	<b>45</b>
Household routines	45
Cooking and baking	49
Shopping	50
Mealtimes	51
Bath night	52
Bedtime routines	54
Chores	54
Earning a few bob	55
Spending the money	56
Leisure hours	57
Outdoor activities	59
Getting into trouble	61
Religion	61
Societies and clubs	63
Special occasions	64
Holidays	65
Clothes	67
Discipline	69

Illnesses	70
Pets	72
Travel	73
Difficult times	74
Points to ponder	76
Top tips	76
<b>5 Schooldays</b>	<b>77</b>
First day at school	78
School buildings	79
Teachers	80
Friends	80
The school day	81
The curriculum	82
Other activities	85
Music	87
School plays	88
School clubs	88
Religion	88
Positions of responsibility	89
Achievements	89
Punishments	90
Highlights of the school year	91
Boarding school	91
Overseas education	92
Alternative schooling	93
Further topics for consideration	95
What next?	97
Further education and university	98
Useful materials to consult	100
Points to ponder	101
Top tips	101
<b>6 Growing up and Early Work Experience</b>	<b>103</b>
Finding a job	103
Setting the scene	107
Apprenticeships	108
Joining the Services	109
Living away from home	109
Initiation rites	110

Early work experiences	112
Earning money	113
Social life	114
Fashion	114
Smoking	116
Romance	117
Being home on time	118
Holidays	119
Points to ponder	120
Top tips	120
<b>7 The War Years – Part I: Everyday Life in Britain</b>	<b>121</b>
War clouds looming	122
The outbreak of war	123
Enemy aliens	123
Being evacuated	124
Receiving evacuees	126
The phoney war	127
The Blitz	129
The war years – as a youngster	131
Growing up during the war years	131
Food	132
Rationing	134
The black market	135
Make-do-and-mend	136
News of the war	137
American GIs	138
On the lighter side	139
Miscellany	142
The V1 and V2	142
The end of the war	143
Demobilisation	144
The aftermath	145
Points to ponder	146
Top tips	146
<b>8 The War Years – Part II: Serving the Nation</b>	<b>147</b>
Home defence	147
Conscription	148
First impressions of service life	150
Training	152

War service	153
The end of the war	163
Demobilisation	163
Points to ponder	164
Top tips	164
<b>9 National Service</b>	<b>165</b>
Background	165
Joining up	166
Basic training	167
The parade ground	169
Never complaining or volunteering	170
Pulling together	171
Officer training	172
Postings	173
The final analysis	174
Points to ponder	174
Top tips	175
<b>10 Love and Marriage</b>	<b>176</b>
Meeting your partner	176
Courting days	179
The proposal	179
Parental concerns	181
Planning the wedding	181
Your wedding day	182
The reception	184
Wartime weddings	185
The honeymoon	186
Giving up work	187
Finding love in later life	188
The single life	189
Divorce and difficult marriages	189
Death of loved ones	190
Points to ponder	190
Top tips	190
<b>11 The Middle Years</b>	<b>191</b>
Taking lodgings	192
A home of your own	194
Buying your first house	195

Making your house into a home	196
Aspirations of luxury	196
Do-it-yourself	196
Gardening	197
Having children	198
Children growing up	199
Learning to drive	200
Holidays	201
Special events	201
You've never had it so good	202
Points to ponder	205
Top tips	206
<b>12 Working Life</b>	<b>207</b>
General guidelines	208
Setting the scene	208
Looking too young	209
Politics	209
Training and further study	210
Writing about colleagues	210
Climbing the corporate ladder	211
The changing face of industry	211
The low points	212
The high points	212
Running your own business	213
Points to ponder	214
Top tips	214
<b>13 The Later Years</b>	<b>215</b>
Children leaving home	215
Marriage of children	216
Family celebrations	216
The next generation	217
Retirement	218
A new way of life	218
Holidays	219
Concluding your book	219
Points to ponder	221
Top tips	222
<b>Major Events of 1930–1979</b>	<b>223</b>

# *How to Use This Book*

This book is intended for those wishing to write their life story. It is aimed primarily at anyone born before the end of the Second World War, but the techniques used will also be of value to those of a younger vintage.

The emphasis is not to write a bestseller, but a personal record for family and friends to enjoy. Whilst those with higher ambitions will find the book helpful, it is essentially intended for the enthusiastic hobbyist writing to celebrate life. Typically this will include those you have known and loved, the events that have shaped your life, and the fascinating social history witnessed along the way.

Adopting a chronological approach, each chapter looks at a different aspect of life. Two chapters are devoted to the war years; which one is relevant will depend on your age. As with the rest of the chapters, feel free to pick and chose as appropriate. At the end of each chapter some writing tips are included, as well as questions to help stimulate further thought.

A series of personal anecdotes appear throughout the book, providing snap-shots of life in the middle years of the twentieth century – all are written by amateur authors who grew up in Britain during this era.

Finally, history notes covering the 50 years from 1930 are also included. In addition to national and world events, these include musical hits of the year, films, best-selling books and sporting highlights to further jog your memory.

Use this book as it suits you. Select what you want and let the memories roll!



# *Meeting the Family*

# 1

This chapter looks at those who were likely to have been influential in your formative years – grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and siblings. It also provides the opportunity to record what you know about those family members you were too young to remember; people who will live on through your book.

---

## ***Making a start***

The two most popular ways to start writing about your family are:

- ⌘ introducing yourself;
- ⌘ recording your family background.

Which you choose will depend, in part, on how much is known about the family history.

---

## *Introducing yourself*

The easiest and most popular way to start your book is to introduce yourself and a few basic facts:

- ⌘ your full name;
- ⌘ your date of birth;
- ⌘ where you were born;
- ⌘ the names of your parents;
- ⌘ brief details of other siblings;
- ⌘ anything interesting about your birth.

The beauty of this straightforward approach is that it gets you into the swing of writing immediately.

### *Case study – Ann Davies*

I came into this world at Burghclere, Hampshire, on 12 February 1936, the fifth child and third daughter of Harry and Caroline Hiller. Ahead of me were Mary, Leslie, Peter and Edith – Edith was known to us all as Queenie. I was christened Ann and for some reason was the only child to have just one forename – I thought that perhaps my parents had run out of names!

Home was a small council house – No.2 Harts Cottages – in a group of three semi-detached houses. I do not recall living there, as a couple of years later we moved house. However, this was no great upheaval as we moved next door to No.1. The reason for this minor migration was that our new home, being on the end of the block, was larger; it also had the bonus of a bigger garden.

(The story then carries on in this style with the introduction of Ann's three younger sisters. Details about grandparents, uncles and aunts are also gently incorporated into the story.)

*Reflecting back*

With the above approach, if you want to include some family history, you can introduce yourself and your immediate family and then write something like: 'Before I proceed too far with my own story, I will record a little of what I know about my ancestors.' This then provides an opportunity to write about those you never knew or were too young to remember.

*Using flashbacks*

If you do not have much information about your family background, you can include what you do know via a series of flashbacks, for example, '... my parents always went to the Lake District for their anniversary because that was where they met on a walking holiday and it always remained a special place for them.'

---

## ***Recording your family background***

Whatever information you know about your family background is worth including in your book. Starting from as far back as you can, even if it is only your grandparents, bring your writing up to the point where you enter the story. There is no need to undertake detailed genealogical research; just record what you know already. Snippets of information gleaned over the years might include:

- ⌘ where the family originated;
- ⌘ the derivation of the surname and any changes made over the years;
- ⌘ family names and nicknames passed down the generations;
- ⌘ the size of families;
- ⌘ notable characters;
- ⌘ recurrent careers and jobs;
- ⌘ physical attributes passed down the generations;
- ⌘ property owned by the family, or even an ancestral home.

You may well know more about your family background than you give yourself credit for. Not only will this be useful for setting the scene,

but any future genealogists in the family will certainly be grateful as well. Relatives and family friends might also be able to provide additional detail.

### *Skeletons in the cupboard*

If the 'skeletons' relate to relatively recent events, care should be taken in deciding what is included; it is not the intention here to open up old wounds or cause a family rift. However, where sufficient time has passed, don't miss the opportunity to include the stories that have gone down in family folklore.

---

## ***Advice for genealogists***

Those going back two or more generations might want to divide the material into the maternal and paternal sides of the family, including sub-headings for various branches of the family.

Whilst it is possible to include several chapters of family history alongside your own life story, care should be taken not to confuse the two projects. Genealogy can be a little on the dry side for those who are not so enthusiastic about the subject – even those within the family. Your life story, on the other hand, will appeal to a wider audience of family and friends alike, because it is about you – someone they know personally. Also, you will be able to include insights, feelings and anecdotes to bring your writing alive, something not easily achieved with the historical review.

Should you wish to include reams of information about your ancestors, several options exist:

- ❧ Use an appendix – Appendices are ideal for detailed and/or lengthy information which otherwise might create an imbalance in the book, putting off all but the most dedicated readers before they even reach the point where you are introduced to the story. The more pertinent information can be included at the beginning of the book with a reference to the full account in the appendix for those who are interested.

- ⌘ Include tables and lists – Genealogical information can be concisely displayed in tables or lists, saving on pages of narrative. It is also easier to spot trends, like recurrent names and professions, by such presentation. If there are several pages, again, the best place may be the appendix.
- ⌘ Keep additional information with the book – Storing your autobiography in a presentation box will keep it in pristine condition as well as being an ideal depository for information too voluminous even for an appendix.
- ⌘ Insert a family tree – Reams of names and dates can be tedious when writing about distant ancestors. If these are displayed in a family tree, the more pertinent conclusions can then be included in the narrative without boring the reader. For example, ‘My great-grandmother, Grace Gammon, was born on 3 October 1883. She was the third of 13 children, but as she had two older brothers it fell to her to look after the rest of the clan ....’

If the family tree can be condensed onto a page or a folded larger sheet, it can be incorporated within the book perhaps as an appendix. Other options are to insert it into a wallet attached to the front or back inside covers of the book, or alongside the book in its presentation box. The advantage of keeping the family tree loose is that it can be updated as the family evolves.

- ⌘ Redefine the project – You might have enough information to divide your book into two parts: one for recording your family history and the other for writing about your own life. This way your readers have the option of being selective and choosing what is of interest. The division can be explained in the introduction, and even reflected in the title of the book – ‘The Life Story of George Lloyd, incorporating the History of the Lloyd Family’.
- ⌘ Separate the book into two projects – If there is enough information for a book on family history alone, consider presenting this independently of your life story.