

WHAT IF I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH OF MY CHILDHOOD?



Many people have a hard time remembering stories from childhood. Here are some practical suggestions when you have few memories.

Be careful not to **minimize** the stories that you do remember. You may have stories that you *do* remember, but you are dismissing them as “no big deal.” These stories are often a good place to start! Write one of them.

Look through old **photo albums**. Then carve out some quiet time to be alone... and just sit with the photos. Notice what comes up for you.

Find the **films** that move you and watch them often.

Identify the **music** that moves you and listen to it often. Beauty opens the heart to the truth of story.

Go back and visit your elementary, middle, and high **schools**. Visit the neighborhood you grew up in.

Pay attention to your **present** day to day life for clues to your past. What circumstances evoke strong responses from you? What angers you? What makes you anxious? Do you have a

sense of why those circumstances elicit those responses? Is there some connection to your story?

Ask your **siblings** what they remember from your growing up years. Consider family lore.

Ask God to reveal a story to you. Just one.

You need not strive to remember things. This is not about striving. Memories will come as you are ready for them. While you wait, focus on preparing to welcome whatever story comes in whatever form it arrives. Even just a few fragments can eventually become a fuller, more revealing story.

Remember, **kindness and curiosity** will take you much further than you think when it comes to engaging your story and healing from trauma. Kindness and curiosity!

Questions To Help You Remember Your Stories

Who taught you how to drive? What was that experience like?

When you got your first period, who did you tell? Describe the conversation — or lack thereof — and reflect on who you chose to tell.

Who gave you the sex talk? What was that like for you?

What was the name of your third grade teacher? What is one memory that you have from third grade? Do this for every grade from Kindergarten through your senior year in high school.

Who in your growing up years who was very kind to you? Name this person and describe how they treated you or relate a story of their kindness. How did you feel in the presence of this person?

Who is someone you will always remember? Why will you always remember him or her?

Describe a time in your life when you felt alone.

What were holidays like in your family? What were holidays like *for you*? What traditions (formal or informal, positive or negative) accompanied holidays and birthdays? It may be easier to consider a particular birthday or holiday like “my ninth birthday” or “Thanksgiving when I was about 13.”

If your family took family vacations, reflect on them: where did you go? What was it like for you? What was good about it? What was not so good about it? If your family didn’t take family vacations, reflect on how you felt about that as a child and how you feel about that now.

Who helped you with your homework? What was that like for you?

Three Exercises To Help You Remember Stories

1. Imagine your life divided into three periods: infancy to 5th grade, middle school, and high school/college. Identify two high points and two low points during each period. Write a few sentences about each. For example, as you think back on your elementary school years, what were some of the best scenes and worst scenes in your life. Repeat the process for the other two periods. (Jot down whatever scenes come to mind; whether or not they were the absolute highs or lows of the period is not the most important thing!)
2. If you were writing a novel and had to introduce the character of your mother, how would you describe her? How would you give your reader a sense of what this woman was like? Repeat the process with your father.
3. Choose three adjectives to describe your *relationship* with your mother. Then write a short story that illustrates how that adjective is true about your relationship with her. For example, one of your adjectives might be “distant.” Write out a story or anecdote that illustrates how your relationship with your Mom was distant. If one of your adjectives is “caring,” write out a story that illustrates how your relationship with your Mom was caring. Then choose three adjectives that describe your *relationship* with your father and repeat the process.