

Writing the Chapters of Your Life: Surprising Insights Using This Special Journaling Technique

 by: Patti Testerman List-making is a favorite journaling technique and is often used to quickly jot down a numbered record on topics like “my beliefs,” “my pet peeves,” “the things I hate about myself,” or “my strengths.” However, there’s a special type of list technique that moves beyond a simple itemization and into the realm of significant self-awareness. This special technique has several names, including table-of-contents, life chapters, and stepping-stones, the latter term used by journaling expert, Ira Progoff. Using this technique the writer lists their most important life events, as though they were chapter headings in an autobiography. Progoff and other suggest keeping the number of items to around a dozen, to ensure the inclusion of only major events. One writer’s listed these items: 1. Brother died when I was three years old. 2. Mom went into the hospital when I was five, and I didn’t know why or when she would come home. 3. Grandma died when I was ten, and because of my age they wouldn’t let me go to the hospital and see her. 4. Dad died of a sudden heart attack when I was 15. I was with him but couldn’t save his life. 5. I fell in love but we lived in different cities and things just never seemed to work out. 6. My step-father died—how could this happen? 7. My long-distance love affair ended. 8. I fell in love again and thought it was for a lifetime. 9. I got married and was happy, at least for a long time. 10. I got divorced. It wasn’t for a lifetime. Is there any doubt that this journal-writer has major issues concerning death and other ending issues? And, do you notice the lack of happy events? After this diarist created the stepping stones, she then wrote about each, realizing how many unresolved issues she carried with her—and how they impacted her ability to be happy. As you do this exercise several times over months or years, you’ll find your choice of events changing. Sometimes your first love affair is the most important thing on the list, and other times it won’t make the top 10 or 12 at all. Why? Because the list reflects the issues that cry out for attention. When you’re comfortable with this technique, try using it for specific topics, like the stepping stones of your weight issues, or relationships, or spiritual growth. Don’t be afraid to experiment. Good writing! Copyright 2004 Patti Testerman

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