



Chapter by Chapter: Writing Our Lives

A Six-Week Guided Autobiography Workshop

Your Write Path | Led by Mark McNease

Chapter by Chapter: Writing Our Lives is a six-week guided journaling workshop that walks through the arc of a life—from beginnings through childhood, coming of age, adulthood, love and loss, and into the present. Each week takes up the next chapter, in order, through weekly themes, prompts, and shared reflection. Conducted live via Zoom, each session builds on the last, creating a supportive environment where participants can share what they wrote for the week.

No writing experience is required. This workshop is for anyone who wants to look more closely at their own life and put it into words, whether that's your first time journaling or your fifteenth.

How the Weeks Work

Each week takes up the next chapter of the life arc, moving forward in time from one session to the next, and every week includes at least one short flash writing exercise. Starting with Week 2, you'll write to that week's prompt on your own time during the week beforehand, then bring your piece with you to share and discuss when we meet. Week 1 is the only exception, since it's our first time together as a group. That first piece of writing happens live, in the room, and there's no homework beforehand.

Every session follows the same rhythm:

- A short check-in to reconnect as a group
- An ice breaker
- At least one flash writing exercise
- Guided discussion around that week's theme
- A close, with the next prompt to write before we meet again

A note on privacy: what's shared in the circle stays in the circle. Real emotion often surfaces, and the group is a safe and confidential environment.

The Six Weeks

Week 1: Beginnings

Every life story has to start somewhere. It begins with the family, the place, and the circumstances we were born into, before we had any say in the matter. This week we open the book to its first page: the world as it was when we arrived.

In this first session, we write together: Following an ice breaker and short writing exercise (a postcard, a room description, a story told by everyone—these will be provided as the weeks progress), you'll write from your earliest memory, or the story of your own beginning as you've heard it told, and let it lead without worrying about writing it "correctly." What was the world like that you were born into, both microcosmically within your own environment, and macrocosmically in the broader world? (Who was the president? What music were people listening to? Were we at war?) There is no prompt to prepare for Week 1 since the group is meeting for the first time.

The theme and sub-prompts for each subsequent week will be distributed for you to write to and bring to the next session. **Theme for Week 2: In the Beginning**

Week 2: Childhood

Recurring opening with ice breaker and flash writing.

We move into the earliest years that formed us. Home, family roles, the stories we were told and that we told ourselves about our families. This session looks at childhood not as a single memory but as the ground everything else was built on.

Before this session, you'll write: *about your identity as it formed. What place did you have in your family? Were you an only child, or did you have siblings? Was there a hierarchy? And what were the dynamics in your family (or families)?*

Theme for Week 3: Between Two Worlds

Week 3: Coming of Age

Recurring opening with ice breaker and flash writing.

This is the week we start becoming someone apart from our families. The first real choices, the first sense of a self we were building on our own. We look at the crossroads of adolescence and early independence, and how one choice at that age can ripple forward through everything that follows.

Before this session, you'll write: *about a decision from your coming-of-age years that changed your path—a “before and after” moment—what you chose, what you left behind, and what you didn't yet know at the time. Bring your writing with you to share.*

Theme for Week 4: All Grown Up

Week 4: Building a Life

Recurring opening with ice breaker and flash writing.

We move into adulthood proper: the careers, callings, and roles, paid or unpaid, that shaped our sense of identity and self-worth as we set out to build something of our own. This week considers the difference between a job and a calling, and how that work became part of who we are.

Before this session, you'll write: *about the work you wanted and the work you chose, which may not be the same! Did you have a passion at this point, a path you wanted to take? And did you take it? What has your work life been? Has it been fulfilling? What would you change, if anything?*

Theme for Week 5: To Everything a Season

Week 5: Love, Loss, and What Stays

Recurring opening with ice breaker and flash writing.

As adulthood lengthens, so do our attachments. This session explores the relationships across our adult lives that changed how we see the world. Who are the people we've shared our lives with? Are they still with you? And who have you said goodbye to?

Before this session, you'll write: *about people who loved you well, challenged you, or whose absence you still carry—and what you might still want to say to them. Bring your writing with you to share.*

Theme for Week 6: To Whom It May Concern

Week 6: A Love Letter

Recurring opening with ice breaker and flash writing.

We arrive at now, the present chapter still being written, and close out this journey by writing a life overview in the form of a letter. Chose an age for yourself, any age, and write a love letter, telling that person in an earlier time what this journey has been like. The ups, the downs, the in-betweens. What advice would you give a younger you? What warnings? What joys lie ahead? Take your time. This is a letter you may keep, or that you may never read again. Make it count.

What to Bring

A journal or notebook (or write you your computer, a pen you like (or a keyboard), and whatever part of your story you're ready to start with. Everything else, prompts, structure, and support, will be provided.