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How to Article
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WRITE A MEMOIR AND PUBLISH IT FOR FREE

By Karl Arnold Belser

Write a Memoir. Live forever. Who cares? I didn't, but my son Charlie did because he asked me to write about a few of my life experiences. The project grew until I had a memoir containing 45 stories.

I scanned some of my mementos such as a student body card with my picture on it and a painting of my home in 1945 and used them as illustrations. I think that writing a memoir is an excellent way to get organized before one dies. It is also an effective way of deflecting those mementos from the trash bin.

I received a surprising bonus in this effort. I learned things about my self. As Socrates said several thousand years ago, "An unexamined life is not worth

living.”¹ I found out what he meant and it’s hard to explain the value I felt in discovering why and how my life events occurred.

I confess that some of my original stories were so poorly written that my sister-in-law Mary suggested that I take a writing class. I did and I studied and wrote for two years in a San Jose, CA municipal adult education class called “Fact and Fiction for Fun and Profit” taught by author Erna Holyer. The result was my book *Memoirs of a Late 20th Century Engineer*.

How could I publish my book? I am retired and I didn’t want boxes of books in my garage that would ultimately find a home in the garbage. I bought a double-sided Brother laser printer and made a few letter sized, black and white copies in a clear plastic notebook with a color cover page insert. However, I wanted color printing because most of the photos and illustrations were in color.

I didn’t want to pay for color printing. The black and white books already cost \$20 each not counting my labor. Hence I converted the Microsoft WORD document into a PDF

¹ See the Internet quote data base at <http://www.quotedb.com/quotes/1563>

file format² and posted it on the free web space that Earthlink³ allows me as part of my email account.

Creating a website is somewhat tricky and you may need help. I read a web article titled HOW WEB PAGES WORK⁴ on *How Stuff Works* about creating a web page in html. This was too difficult, but I now understood in principle how to create and fill in an html table. I downloaded the free Netscape Communicator 7.1⁵ browser and used the "what you see is what you get" web page generator called COMPOSER. I used it to create a personal website without having to write any html code. Then I posted the book on my personal home page <http://home.netcom.com/~kbelser/>.

Despite the convenience of the PDF format many people including my son Charlie, who takes the train to work every day, have told me that they would prefer an MP3 audio book. I bought a program called TextAloud⁶ with the beautiful AT&T voices and converted the book to MP3 by chapter. There are many Text-to-Speech-to-MP3 conversion programs available. I

² Get a free PDF writer called CutePDF from Acro Software at <http://www.cutepdf.com/Products/CutePDF/writer.asp> but note that the Adobe PDF writer compresses images much better at a cost of about \$300. See <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatstd/main.html>

³ Get an Earthlink e-mail account at <http://www.earthlink.net/access/>

⁴ HOW WEB PAGES WORK by Marshall Brain can be read at <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/web-page.htm>

⁵ Get the free Netscape Communicator 7.1 with COMPOSER from Soft32.com at http://www.soft32.com/download_8.html

⁶ Get the low cost TextAloud text-to-speech converter at NextUp.com at <http://www.nextup.com/>

also posted this audio book on my website. The net was that my son finally read my life stories.

If the technicalities of this discussion intimidate you, there are many computer science types that will find setting up a website, scanning pictures, PDF distilling, and MP3 creation relatively simple. So get some help.

Take a look at my website and see if PDF or MP3 audio publishing of family history might not work for you or your parents. It's an effort of love, not money.

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