

Easy tips to polish personal and family stories

by The Memoir Network

Everyone has stories to tell, but can ordinary people learn the skills and techniques necessary to write a meaningful and interesting memoir?

“Yes!” says Denis Ledoux, founder of The Memoir Network, a premier memoir-writing coaching and editing company. “Anyone who

wants to can learn the tasks necessary to write a memoir to bequeath with pride to children and grandchildren – or to the world. Every step in the writing process is important and accessible. Lots of people have done the first part of writing their lifestories but haven’t taken the other important step – polishing them

in the editing process.”

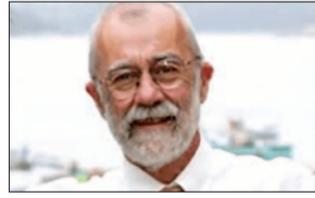
The secret to giving your stories the finishing touch, Ledoux maintains, is to read your manuscript, as your reader will – with fresh, observant eyes. That’s why, at some point, an outside editor can be so useful, but any writer – even a new one – can learn the basics of the editing process. Here are some simple steps to keep in mind.

■ **Be complete.** Have you written everything you need to write about your story to make it clear what happened and to whom? Would a stranger understand? If you find yourself adlibbing as you share your story out loud, you probably have not written enough. Add the ad-lobbed details of setting, action, or relationships that make your story more complete and, therefore, more understandable.

■ **Be concise.** This may sound like it’s the opposite of “complete” but it need not be. Have you eliminated all the extra words you can without changing the meaning of the story? If you find you have restated an idea – even in different words – you are probably being redundant – and that is the opposite of “concise”. Saying it once is enough. Choose the most effective version and delete the others.

Edit out the material (even if interesting) that does not contribute to the overall impact you are aiming for in the story. (This material can be saved for another story.) “Ought to be deleted” includes all the side stories which, however interesting in themselves, dilute your main story.

You can also apply the 10% rule: once you think you have finished your text, excise 10% of it. That means that, in the end, your text will be 10% shorter. You will find this always produces a more impact-



DENIS LEDOUX, founder of The Memoir Network.

Photo courtesy of The Memoir Network

ful text! It does for me. Try it for yourself!

■ **Use precise language.** Avoid vague adjectives like nice, awful, okay. Replace them with settings, dialogues, or actions. “She was poor” is vague but “Her living room had a linoleum rug, tattered at the edges, that barely reached from the couch to the chairs” shows a setting that gives a strong sense of “poor.” “She was nice” is vague but “She listened with her head turned to catch my every word” portrays a definite “nice.” Editing out goes for adverbs, too. They can mean different things to different readers. Memoirs with imprecise words don’t convey as much meaning as they could! A useful exercise is to replace half – yes half! – of your adjectives and adverbs with dialogue, action or setting. This almost always makes your text more forceful.

■ **Set your manuscript aside for a while.** Time – a month, six months – will provide the emotional distance to evaluate your work more clearly. Time will help to identify both your strengths and your shortcomings where re-writing is essential.

“I’m always amazed at how much objectivity I can manage to muster when I reread my own work after a lapse of time,” says Ledoux. “Waiting a while allows me to step out of the role of writer and into that of the reader and the edi-

tor. I can then assess the strengths and the weaknesses of my writing – and edit to improve stories.”

■ **Show your manuscript to others for their critiques.** A mix of readers – family, friends, a professional editor – will produce the various feedback necessary to spotting problems. Family members will notice missing details and provide you with important dates and relationships that complete or explain your story. Friends aren’t familiar with your content and so will ask you for information you may have thought irrelevant or evident. They will ask for cause-and-effect relationships (“so which did you do first?” and for motivation (“now why did your brother do that?”). They will ask for things you had no idea could be asked of your story!

Choose readers who will critique the work and not you. Don’t waste your energy justifying to them why you are writing. And don’t write someone else’s version of a family story. Conversely, people who are blindly supportive are not helpful editors (“Anything you do is great by me, dear!”).

You can post a request at a library, a senior center, or a bookstore to form a memoir-writing group to serve as readers and editors for one another.

■ **If you need to explain anything, re-write for clarity!** Your story needs to be so clear that it answers its own questions. Most basically, be sure you provide details, dates, names, and relationships. On a deeper level, depict the inner life (yours or of another person) that might explain so much of what happened in the story.

Don’t be discouraged if you see the need for changes. Most successful writers are persevering re-writers!

• New to Christmas in Cle Elum •

A Holiday Market in the downtown district

CLE ELUM – With the help and partnership of Serendipity Crafts & Vintage Collectibles, on Saturday, Dec. 7, Cle Elum Downtown Association (CEDA) opens a Holiday Mar-

ket during the Christmas in Cle Elum celebration.

For starters, the market features vendors showcasing mosaic plates, jewelry, hand-thrown pottery, tea-light jars,

gift cards, quilted items, barbed wire art, pebble art, and LuLaRoe clothing.

This 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. event is in the recently vacated Intermountain Radio Shack building at 208 E. 1st St. Serendipity owner Cyndi Crawford had this to say.

“We’ll have many additional, talented vendors on hand offering a lot of unique gifts for family and friends. We welcome everybody to join us.”

Why the market?

Debbie Bogart, CEDA Executive Director, said, “Utilizing empty spaces is part of our strategy to help visitors look at stores that are now available for rent or purchase. We have a lot of unique and historic buildings just waiting for businesses to occupy.

“For instance, in addition to the Holiday Market this year, at Boxcar Billy’s families can visit with Santa and kids can make crafts in his workshop.

“And next to Boxcar Billy’s, Boulet Theatre Productions is performing in the building vacated by Paradise Mountain Log Homes.”

Bogart reminds the community that the Annual Snowball Drop on Saturday, Dec. 7, is supported by more than 35 local businesses.

“The Grinch launches snowballs at noon on Harris Avenue. Catch a snowball, match the number on the snowball to a vendor, visit the vendor and claim a prize.”

Correction

Mountain Voices Community Choir performs its free concert at Cle Elum’s Community Church, 3rd and Harris, on Saturday, Dec. 7 at 3:00 pm. The time was listed incorrectly in a story published last week. For more info, see the ad at left.

Boulet Theatre Productions is proud to present 2019's

HOLIDAY RADIO PLAYS

“Double Feature”

Saturday Dec. 7 8pm | Saturday Dec. 14 7pm | Sunday Dec. 15 2pm

Christmas SHORTS

by Lucy Williams

AND ...

Produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., Englewood, Colorado.

FATHER KNOWS BEST

“Thanksgiving Day Episode”

TICKETS \$10

- Tribune Office Supply
- Country Square
- Western Wear
- Mike's Tavern
- Roslyn Candy Company
- and at the door

117 East First Street (Boxcar Billy's) - Downtown Cle Elum

Questions? Email us: BouletTheatreProductions@gmail.com

Wanting to Buy or Sell in Cle Elum, Roslyn, Ronald or Ellensburg?

I CAN HELP!

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You're invited to the 18th annual

Mountain Voices

December 6 Friday 7PM
7 Saturday 3PM
Cle Elum Community Church 3rd & Harris

December 12 Thursday 7PM
Cle Elum Eagles #649
220 Pennsylvania Ave.
All ages welcome!

CHRISTMAS CONCERT 2019

Christmas Choir & Children's Choir

FREE ADMISSION

Our Gift to the Community!

(Donations Towards Expenses Gladly Accepted)

Major Sponsors: TRIBUNE, SHOEMAKER, Warrior's Quick Stop

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