

# Writing About The Stars in Your Family With Ease

Devon Noel Lee - Family History Fanatics



## Every Family Has a Star

Whether shining or tarnished stars fill your family tree, our ancestors have stories. It's our job to capture and preserve them for future generations. If we don't do it, who will?

However, many of us struggle to know how to tell the stories of our ancestors. How do we start? What do we include? What do we exclude? How can I be objective? What happens if I'm wrong?

My background includes writing human interest stories about the pageant industry. As I wrote about contestants, winners, trainers, directors, and gown providers, I learned several invaluable lessons to write family stories.

- Start with a simple project.
- Begin writing by stating the obvious facts.
- Expand each story with context.
- Include details that help a reader know the person I'm featuring.
- Exclude tangentially related details. While they're valuable, they go in other articles.
- Write so a reader can decide the quality and character of the featured person.
- If I'm wrong, correct a later date.

## SCGS Invites You To Write about Your Family's Stars

The "Stars In Your Family" book initiative from the Southern California Jamboree invites all family historians to submit entries no matter their membership status. The anthology will be available for purchase in May from Amazon. To have your submission considered, follow these guidelines:

- Submit up to two (2) 600 word or less features in a Microsoft Word file.
- Submit entries between 1st February and 15th March of 2021.
- You may include a photograph or drawing with your entry.
- Submit your stories early. The editor will include articles on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- Be advised SCGS project editor has the right to edit the document for fit and clarity.
- Submit entries to [starsinyourfamily@scgsgenealogy.com](mailto:starsinyourfamily@scgsgenealogy.com)

Website: [www.FamilyHistoryFanatics.com](http://www.FamilyHistoryFanatics.com)

Email: [familyhistoryfanatics@gmail.com](mailto:familyhistoryfanatics@gmail.com)

Twitter: [@FHFanatics](https://twitter.com/FHFanatics)

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## Five Types of 600 Word Featurettes

When writing short features about an ancestor, I find they fall into five main categories:

- **Biographical Sketch:** These brief essays cover the genealogically significant details about one person's life, including their parents and sibling relationships as well as their spouse and children.
- **Response to a Question:** This narrative takes portions of the biographical sketch and focuses on one aspect of a relative's life. The story only includes details that answer the question posed, such as the following:
  - Can William live a full life after losing his eyesight?
  - Why did Joseph choose to emigrate to Cincinnati, Ohio, from Baden, Germany, in 1849?
  - What did Caroline do after her husband died, leaving her with four children under the age of 5?
  - What was Harry's military service experience like during the Vietnam War?
- **Photo Essay:** Using one or more photos as the foundation, the writer explains the story behind the images. The author strives to transport a reader to the time and place of the picture so they can see, feel, and experience that moment in time.
- **Memory Snippets:** Some family stories lack documentation or photographs. Thus, a writer strives to transport a reader to the time and place of a specific moment in a relative's life. If you've ever heard or shared family stories at gatherings, then you have the foundation to write a memory snippet.
- **Stories of Power:** Sometimes our stars change us, and we can write about that change of perspective in an essay.

To read the samples featured in the webinar, visit my blog for the following posts:

- [Biographical Sketch - Elmira Young](#)
- [Response to a Question - Can a blinded Civil War Veteran live a full life?](#)
- [Photo Essay - Louise sent Lewis a Funny Photo in 1944](#)
- [Memory Shippets - Moose, tells Bob to "Hold This." but not for how long.](#)

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- [Recollections - How My Dad Became My Hero After He Died](#)

## Resources for Writing Stories

Often our stories require historical context to provide richer details to help readers sense the world of our relatives. These resources have a wealth of more information.

- dMaire Time Capsule - <https://dmarie.com/timecap> - enter in a specific date and discover quick facts about a day in history
- Wikipedia- <https://www.wikipedia.org> - use quick facts from the dMaire website to read brief reports about those details.
- Food Timeline - <http://www.foodtimeline.org> - Discover an overview of when specific foods were developed and used throughout the world. Also, read recipes and cookbooks throughout time.
- University Agriculture Extension Organizations - Land Grant Universities in the US educate the public on the environment and agriculture. Use Google to access the Ag Extension Service for your ancestor's residence state for plant and animal life native to the area.
- National Climatic Data Center - <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov> Discover weather data have been recorded from as early as 1870 for most places, or into the 1700s for others.
- Currency Convert from <http://historicalstatistics.org> - Convert any currency at a specific time (in the last several hundred years) into any other currency at a different time. Turn grandpa's wages of 15 shillings a day in 1900 Wales into today's US dollars.

## More Training For Writing Family Histories

This webinar is just the beginning of your writing journey. Visit the following resources for more training on writing your family histories:

- Writing Tips from the Family History Fanatics Blog  
<https://www.familyhistoryfanatics.com/writing-family-history>
- Writing Tips from the Family History Fanatics YouTube Channel <https://tinyurl.com/FHFWritingVideos>
- The Family History Writing Studio by Lynn Palermo <https://www.familyhistorywritingstudio.com>
- Laura Hedgecock Tips: <https://treasurechestofmemories.com/11-things-writing-your-family-history>

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