

This autobiography - covering George Montgomery's first 75 years - aims to both inform and amuse readers. It details the opportunities and evaluates his performance in four occupational roles. Finally, he lived his dream by serving with his father in the Michigan Legislature.

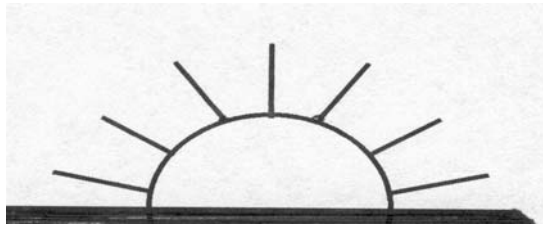
Interim Report: My Life as a Student, Soldier, Teacher and
Lawmaker

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Interim Report:
My Life as a
Student,
Soldier,
Teacher &
Lawmaker

George F.
Montgomery



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Interim Report:
My Life as a
Student,
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and
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George F. Montgomery

Member, House of Representatives

73rd, 74th & 75th

Michigan Legislatures

1965-1970

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Chapter 00: Why Write an Autobiography?

Since my retirement in 1999, I have studied genealogy and searched for my roots. Dates of birth, marriage and death and places of residence in census years frame the life of each ancestor. My knowledge of American history and geography provides some background for understanding, but I still wonder what their lives were really like. I wish that each of my ancestors had left some letters, a diary or journal, or better yet an autobiography. Unfortunately, in so far as I have been able to discover, none of them did. Except in families with a strong oral tradition, children and grandchildren often know very little about the earlier lives of their parents and grandparents. The senior generation is reluctant to talk about their experiences and the younger generations are too busy or too timid to ask, so intergenerational conversation is too often stifled.

For my children, grandchildren, even my as yet unborn great-grandchildren, and perhaps also for other readers, I leave this autobiography—a chronological narrative of events beginning with my birth and continuing through various chapters of my life. We need not be at death's doorstep before we pause to recall and record our life's story. It is never too early to start, and starting early may preserve memories that might otherwise be lost.

Now that I am nearer to the end than to the beginning—being in the memoir-writing stage of life—I decided that 2005, my 72nd year, was an ideal time to start to write my life story. I began in January by learning how to use memory triggers in Writers-Weekly University's on-line course "How to Remember, Write and Publish Your Life Story." As instructed, I created a notebook with a page for each year, and began to organize the events of my life. Next, I grouped the years into nine logical chapters and started writing. By the time the course ended in March, I had written parts of the first five chapters—and excerpts from my previously written memoir of my freshman term in the Michigan Legislature provided a running start on the sixth chapter. At that point, I thought I would finish my autobiography before the end of the year. I never dreamed that I would remember the details of so many events.

Writing a book is a challenging task involving endless selections of what to include in detail and what to omit or tiptoe over. Most books are written from beginning to end just as we live our lives from birth to death. Individuals who kept a diary or daily journal may have already written their life story, perhaps without fully realizing what they had done. For others—like me—who did not keep a record of daily occurrences, the writing of an autobiography is a work of creative non-fiction. I had to remember, research, and reconstruct before I was ready to relate my life story.

I experienced several surprises while working on this project. First, the memory-triggers turned out to be a gift that just keeps on giving. I kept a notebook handy to jot down items as they popped into my head—day or night. The list includes things that I'm sure I hadn't thought about for decades. I checked off each one if and when I found an appropriate place where it fit into my narrative. I marvel at the clarity of my recollections. It greatly enhanced my appreciation of the human brain's fantastic capacity to store every minute detail of past events and its ability to retrieve all of that information decades later when stimulated by an appropriate memory trigger.

Next, I discovered that my legislative chapter was much too long, so I divided it into three chapters—one for each of my very different two-year terms. I also found that I had written significant amounts concerning my teaching. I separated these sections into ten sidebars and labeled them Class Notes.

Finally, as I continually reviewed and edited the growing text, I re-evaluated my performance in various situations that I had encountered during my lifetime. I have made some mistakes. Who hasn't? I have also risen to the occasion many times. I summed up these judgments in an added chapter entitled Final Grades. Including this introduction, nine chapters had become thirteen. I evaded the jinx by numbering my chapters from 00 through 12, as seemed appropriate for a teacher and computer programmer.

During my lifetime, I have played a number of roles—each involving a unique set of challenges and opportunities. In childhood I was a son and grandson, a nephew, cousin, sibling, playmate, and occasionally a student. In adulthood I became a spouse, a parent—and, in later years, a grandparent. Along the way I was a musician, an artist, a homeowner, neighbor, and best friend. Some of my roles

identify the occupations I pursued to earn my keep. That list includes newspaper boy, telephone book deliverer, road crew flagman, baggage handler, clerk typist, summer ditch digger, holiday mail carrier, church camp counselor, soldier, teacher, lawmaker, parliamentarian, consultant, and applications programmer. In our society, our job or position provides a major portion of our sense of self worth. In 1999, I gave up the role of professor that I had played for three decades. Yes, I miss it, but I am not sorry that I retired. Now I have the freedom and opportunity to travel more and to concentrate on my latest role as an author.

I have been blessed to live in interesting times and—as an intellectually-curious person and teacher—I have always been a consumer of news. I listened to news on the radio. I read it in newspapers and magazines. I watched news in weekly newsreels at the movies and later in daily newscasts on television. Many of us remember exactly where we were and what we were doing when we learned that some significant event had occurred. As I have a number of such memories, several historic events are mentioned in my narrative. The reader should keep in mind, however, that this is not intended as a comprehensive history of the past 75 years.

I organized this presentation of my life story following the traditional chronological path. In life, as in any complex drama, a number of story-lines develop concurrently. During a single day, I often experienced events belonging to several different story-lines. The legislative process—where hundreds of bills dealing with dozens of issues are always under consideration—is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Although I attempted to minimize flashbacks, strict adherence to chronological sequencing made the narrative too choppy and disrupted the continuity of individual story-lines. So that readers may more easily follow the action, I sometimes stay with a story-line through several events before going back to pick up another story-line.

Because memory can be selective and sometimes imprecise, memoirs and autobiographies often contain more fiction than verifiable truth. I tried to make this one an exception. One of my faults throughout my lifetime has been an excess of frankness. I tell it like I see it—often without considering if my words might be hurtful to others. For that, I do apologize.

In this autobiography, I focused on the challenges I faced in the particular roles I played during the various chapters of my life. A quick glance at the Table of Contents reveals that the three chapters covering my legislative service contain far more detail per year than other chapters. This is entirely appropriate as serving six years in the Michigan Legislature—half-a-lifetime ago—was the central defining experience of my professional career.

Writing a memoir or an autobiography requires acceptance of accountability for your life choices. It also affords the author a therapeutic opportunity to try and make some sense out of his life. That is what I tried to do in this narrative of my recollections of more than 1001 episodes or events in my often routine but sometimes exciting life. I hope it will both entertain and enlighten my children, my grandchildren, perhaps even my as yet unborn great-grandchildren, and other readers.

One fact is inescapable—in an autobiography the subject is the narrator, the central character, and always the star of his own life-story. So pardon my ego while I tell you what I remember about my family, my parents and grandparents, my brother, my aunts, uncles and cousins, my friends and neighbors, and other individuals I encountered during my life as a student, soldier, teacher and lawmaker.

George F. Montgomery
Waterford, Michigan
21 August 2008

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