

## Sudden Autobiography

Kim Stafford

Some ways to write episodes from your life story...

1. What is your earliest memory...?
2. When did you first encounter the natural world...?
3. How would you tell a child about your own childhood...?
4. What conversations happened at your childhood dinner table...? What conversations never happened? What would you say now—speaking into that silence?
5. What are some accomplishments in adult life that you cherish? What were the earliest tributaries of one of these...how did they start?  
Corollary: What is a virtue you cherish? Who helped you develop this virtue?  
Write a letter of gratitude to that person....
6. How would you describe your childhood to an adult friend, not a relative...?  
How would you describe your childhood to a child?
7. Tell a moment from school, ordinary but indelible....
8. Tell a time you got in big trouble.... How is this story changing?
9. Tell in detail about your first day on an early job....
10. Detailed account of a recurring dream....
11. What have your relatives done for you recently...?
12. What is happening at the edges of your life...?
13. Tell a secret you are ready to tell.... Where do you want to go from here?
14. Pose a questions about a mysterious relative, a lost one....then try to answer.
15. Tell the story of your name....
16. What was your darkest night, your coldest...?
17. Tell the story of an encounter with weather....
18. List your eccentric friends, and write about your affection for one....
19. What are your obsessions, and how have you expressed your greatest fanaticism...?
20. Learning to drive...learning to kiss...learning to be silent....
21. A prayer for something you have lost...a blessing for something you have found....

The process of writing this autobiography may be a coherent chronological account, or more likely (and for a writer, more usefully) a series of scenes or episodes, to be mined in your on-going writing practice to become poems, essays, stories, manifestos, rants, letters, chapters in memoir, blessings, or other forms of fearless retrieval....