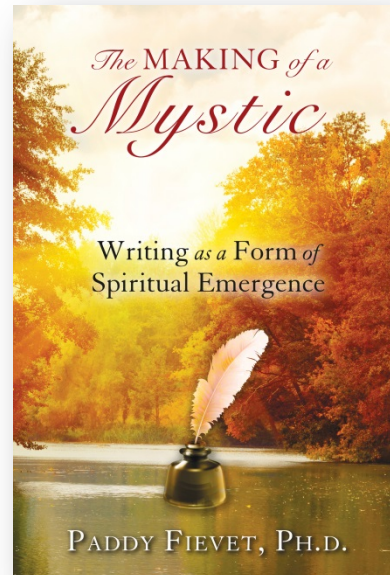


## ARTICLE

# The Joyful Gift of Your Past

By Paddy Fievet, Ph.D.

(800 words)



Several decades ago while sitting in the midst of an awards banquet honoring the year's most successful Realtors, I watched with interest as our newest member weaved through the many tables in order to receive the area's most prestigious award. With a voice that showed astonishment more than personal pride, she clutched her award plaque tightly against her chest as she spontaneously began to list the many failed attempts she had made during her lifetime of earning a living. Five minutes later the room echoed with laughter while she still recited her list. Like Thomas Edison, she had successfully failed many times before discovering her own shining light.

Unlike most of us, the Realtor realized that it is not always the monetary, popular, or fashionable accomplishments in life that give the most long-lasting joy. Instead, the best form of happiness comes as one as one looks back upon life's many experiences, regardless of what happened. Even though this process may initially seem impossible, your past can be the most delightful teacher.

While it may take courage on your part, examining the past can help you change your life for the best. For instance, it teaches what you did not know before as well as what you will not tolerate again. Our personal history teaches us who we are, who we are not, and how we have changed. In its best form, our past shows us when we were courageous, the talents we used to overcome obstacles, and how we have achieved our goals and desires. By examining our experiences as simply events in life instead of the totality of our life, each of us has a chance to change our self-perceptions into honor, respect and harmony. Most important, even the toughest life stories can be perceived as the joyous part of a sacred journey, like pictures in a delightful storybook specifically created for you.

As you examine your past, there is a simple process you can follow to discover the gift

of your past. As you create a renewed perspective, you will discover joyfulness been playing hide and seek in the back corners of your psyche, waiting to be noticed. You can begin this process by following several easy steps.

- First, list the major events of your life. Although they don't have to be in chronological order, it does help if you are able to list them in this way. Don't worry if your list is not complete. This list is simply a starting point.
- Second, start with one specific event. It does not necessarily have to be a happy event. Instead, it can be one that was troublesome in some way.
- Next, revisit the event, as you are able. If this causes you despair, perhaps it may be necessary to get the help of a counselor. If you still are not comfortable with the event you have chosen, then choose another event from your life that is less traumatic. Something simple will work quite well as you learn the process.
- As you revisit this memory, on one side of a paper make a column of the details of this event. Include what you did not know as well as your attitude at the time. On the other side of the paper begin listing positive statements as you look back on the event, such how your attitude has changed, what you have learned, or even the strengths you utilized in the experience.
- Give yourself as much time as you need. Trust the process, for if you have heartfelt intentions of discovering the positive, it will happen.
- Last, write one or more optimistic statements about what you have learned about yourself from this exercise. A suggestion may be to state your life skills, or even some affirmative "I am" statements. Looking back upon our life lessons creates great joy as we understand our past from a new, positive perspective.

As the Realtor finished reciting her life story of failed business attempts, she paused slightly, giving herself time to take in the happy faces sitting in the banquet room. With a voice as refreshing as cool rain drops on a hot, summer day, she said, "Oh my! Haven't I had a lot of opportunities in my life to discover the different techniques needed to successfully sell real estate!" With that statement, she reframed her entire life experience to one of useful learning instead of failure. She laughed heartily as the entire audience stood to applaud the joyful gift of her past.

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