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Memoirs and autobiographies

Memoirs and autobiographies are often thought to be the same thing. Bookstores and places such as Amazon often put them in the same section or category. This is understandable, since most people think that the two terms are interchangeable and thus book titles are easier to find. However, there are important differences between memoirs and autobiographies.

An autobiography is the story of an entire life rather than just one small part of it. A memoir is a short story about your life or a story concerning an important or interesting episode in your life.

An autobiography could cover growing up in a small town in Ontario, moving to Toronto for university, traveling to different countries after graduating, working in the U.S. for a few years, getting married and starting a family, moving to Calgary, starting a business, retiring then writing an autobiography.

A memoir would focus on just one aspect of this, such as childhood in a small Canadian town, your adventures in other countries after university or your memories of one country in particular, stories about your family life, what it was like to live in your town or city in the past, and so on.

Autobiographies are also usually, but not exclusively, written chronologically. They begin at the earliest point in a person's life and continue to the time of writing or reasonably close to that point. The writing features the actions of the people and their historical settings.

Memoirs feature more emotional writing and are usually more personal in nature. A memoir describes the feelings and emotions of the person at the time of the period and during incidents featured in the memoir.