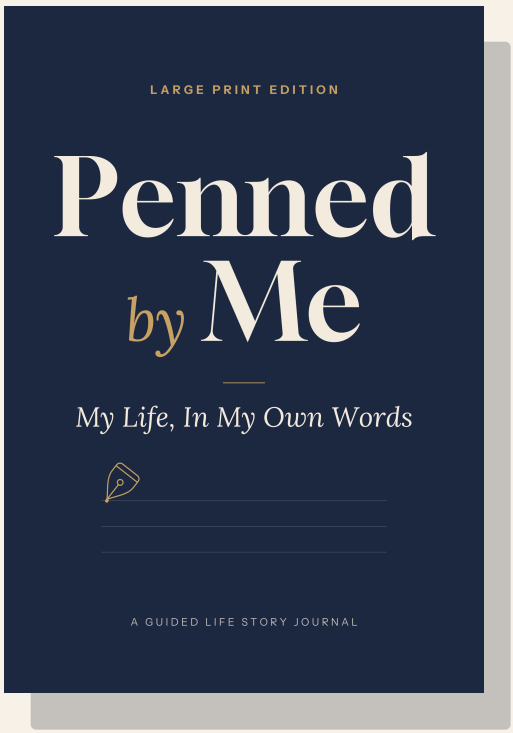
Penned by Me

Writing Together, Gently

A calm companion for helping someone tell their story while keeping every word their own.

A FREE COMPANION GUIDE



PENNEDBYME.COM

A Quiet Place for Their Voice

Penned by Me is a large print life story journal with 56 gentle questions. Every question includes a shorter Or simply prompt. The writer can answer with one word, a few lines or a whole page.

This guide is for the person sitting beside them. You might be a son or daughter, a partner, a grandchild, a friend or a trusted helper.

> **THE HEART OF THE GUIDE**
>
> Your role is not to collect a perfect record. It is to make room for the writer's own voice.

Keep these promises close

- There are no wrong answers.
- Any page may stay empty.
- The book can be used in any order.
- Spelling and neat handwriting do not matter.
- A short session is enough.
- The writer can pause or stop at any time.

The book does not test what someone remembers. It asks what they know, what they love and what they want to say.

Begin With Comfort

Choose a time when the writer feels rested and unhurried. A familiar room, a comfortable chair and good light can make the page feel easier.

Before opening the book

- Turn off the television and reduce background noise.
- Put out one comfortable pen and a glass of water.
- Check that glasses, hearing aids or other helpful items are nearby.
- Ask whether the writer would like company.
- Let the writer choose the page whenever possible.

If choosing from the whole book feels like too much, offer two gentle options:

> **TRY SAYING**
>
> Would you rather write about a favorite meal or a favorite song?

Light questions from Small Joys, a family recipe or a familiar photograph can be an easy place to begin.

We can write one word, one line or nothing at all today.

Then wait. Quiet is part of thinking. There is no need to fill every silence.

Use 'Or simply'

Every main question in Penned by Me has an Or simply prompt underneath it.

Describe the kitchen of the house you grew up in.

Or simply: one smell, one sound, one person you picture there.

Begin by reading the main question slowly. Give the writer time to think. If the question feels too large, read the Or simply prompt.

A helpful rhythm

1. Read the main question.
2. Wait without adding another question.
3. Offer Or simply if a smaller starting point would help.
4. Accept whatever comes.

One word is an answer. So is a name, a smell, a place or a short sentence.

The prompt is not a second test. If neither version feels right, skip the page. Choosing not to answer is also a choice.

Keep the Writer's Own Voice

A helper's job is to make writing easier, not to make the story sound better.

If the writer holds the pen

- Let spelling, punctuation and handwriting be their own.
- Do not point out mistakes unless they ask for help.
- Do not suggest a more polished way to say something.
- Let them cross out, add words or leave a sentence unfinished.

If the writer speaks while you write

- Use their words as closely as possible.
- Keep their order, humor and turns of phrase.
- Read the words back only if they want you to.
- Make changes only at their request.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS

Would you like to write, or would you like me to? | Should I write that exactly as you said it? | Would you like me to read it back? | Is there anything you want to change?

The page belongs to the writer. Their voice matters more than a perfect sentence.

Write Together Without Taking Over

Some stories are easier to tell than to write. The Write Together pages are made for those moments. Each page includes space for Told by, Written by and Date.

Sit beside the writer rather than opposite them. Let them set the pace. Write the story down word for word, and leave room for pauses.

Neutral prompts

- What comes to mind first?
- What happened next?
- What was that place like?
- Who was there?
- Is there anything else you want included?

> **AVOID LEADING OR CORRECTING**
>
> Avoid questions that already contain the answer, such as 'Wasn't that in 1972?' Do not say 'No, that is not how it happened' or 'Try harder.'

Do not finish a sentence unless the writer asks you to. If they do ask, offer a word and let them accept, change or reject it.

One story is enough for one session. There is no need to cover a whole life at once.

When a Memory Feels Uncertain

Memories can be incomplete. Dates can blur. Two people may remember the same day differently.

> **PURPOSE**
>
> Penned by Me is not an audit of a life. It preserves the writer's voice as it is today.

If a detail feels uncertain, the writer can

- Leave it blank.
- Use words such as 'around 1960' or 'when I was young.'
- Return to the page another day.
- Check the detail later, if they want to.

You can say

We can leave the date open. | *Tell me the part that feels clearest.* | *We can check that later if you would like.* | *I can hear that this matters to you.*

If another family member remembers the story differently, their account can be written separately, with the writer's permission. It should not replace or correct the writer's page.

If a question causes distress, stop. Close the book, return attention to the room and offer something familiar or comforting. The page can wait.

Keep a Gentle Session Rhythm

Ten or fifteen minutes is plenty. A useful session can be one page, one sentence or one shared memory.

1. **Settle**

   Take a minute or two to get comfortable. Bring water, glasses and the book within easy reach.

2. **Choose**

   Let the writer select a page, or offer two light choices.

3. **Write or talk**

   Spend five to ten minutes with one question. Leave space for silence.

4. **Close**

   Stop before the writer becomes tired. Add the date where appropriate and thank them for sharing.

> **A GOOD TIME TO PAUSE**
>
> Pause for tiredness, frustration, physical discomfort, losing the place repeatedly or saying 'I can't' more than once.

Thank you for telling me that. | We can come back whenever you want.

Do not measure success by completed pages. A book with empty pages can still hold a whole life.

Simple Tools That Can Help

Keep the space uncluttered. Too many materials can make the session feel like work.

- A dark, easy-flowing pen or a pencil
- A bookmark or sticky note
- Good light and a stable writing surface
- Reading glasses or a magnifier
- A drink of water
- One familiar photograph, object or piece of music

Use photographs as invitations, not quizzes

Instead of asking	Try
Who is this?	*What stands out to you in this photograph?*

If the writer's hand becomes tired, move to a Write Together page and offer to hold the pen.

Only make an audio recording with the writer's clear permission. Explain how it will be used, where it will be kept and who may hear it. If you later turn a recording into writing, keep the writer's wording and let them review it when possible.

After the Session

- Read the page back only if the writer wants you to.
- Complete Told by, Written by and the date where needed.
- Ask whether the page is private or may be shared.
- Mark the next possible starting place with a bookmark.
- Store the book somewhere safe, dry and easy to find.
- Do not edit or fact-check the page afterward.
- Ask permission before copying, scanning or sharing any page.

You may keep a short note outside the book about what helped, such as 'favorite song questions felt easy' or 'morning was a good time.' Keep this practical and respectful.

The book never has to be completely filled. When the writer feels finished, or simply wants to let it rest, that is enough.

> **CLOSE WITH APPRECIATION**
>
> Thank you for trusting me with that story.

A short note

This guide offers general educational support. It is not medical, mental health, legal or professional caregiving advice. Penned by Me, including the What Matters to Me in Care pages, is not an advance directive, medical record or legal document. For medical or legal wishes, use the appropriate professional advice and forms. Seek qualified medical help for sudden or concerning changes in memory, behavior or wellbeing.