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BOOK REVIEW by Marianne Vespry  
for Writing, Aging and Spirit: [www.writingdownouryears.ca](http://www.writingdownouryears.ca)

### **Writing the Sacred Journey: the Art and Practice of Spiritual Memoir**

Elizabeth J. Andrew Boston: Skinner House books, 2005

A spiritual memoir “deals with the bedrock of human existence – why we are here, where we are going, and how we can comport ourselves with dignity along the way. . . [it] is a genre in which one’s life is written with particular attention paid to its mysteries. . . . Spiritual memoirists write because writing brings them closer to the ineffable essence of life.” – from the Introduction.

If you are thinking of writing such a memoir, this book is for you. If you would like to write such a memoir, but know that it is beyond your skill, this book is for you. If “spiritual” doesn’t mean anything to you; if you got through life this far on a mixture of luck and pluck and cunning and help from friends or teacher or lovers, and you want to write about it so the grandkids will understand, this book is for you, too. It gives suggestions on getting started, going on, on paying attention to the places where you get stuck. It reminds you that you are a body as well as a mind and spirit, and suggests ways to embody your story.

Andrew provides examples and exercises to get you started and keep you going. You don’t have to be a skilled writer; you just need to be prepared to work at it, and to honour your story – telling the hard parts, the losses and sorrows, as well as the battles you won. You can try her exercises, you can use them as prompts to write something closer to your own experience.

You can write in no order at all, just bits and pieces to capture whatever incidents are vivid in your memory. You can write of happenings or people that hurt you or helped you or diverted you from an expected path. You can write in chronological order or according to theme or the places where it happened.

You may feel more comfortable knowing your structure before you begin. You may be okay with just getting that first draft of those so-many stories written, and trusting that the structure will become apparent as they accumulate, or in the next draft, or the next. The important thing is to honour the story, and to write.

Afterwards you can identify your focus, your structure; afterwards you must revise. Andrew has guidance and examples for these parts of the work as well.