

Six-Word Memoir

Mr. McMillan – English 8

Once challenged to write a full story in six words, Ernest Hemingway wrote on a napkin: "For Sale: baby shoes, never worn."

In this spirit of simple yet profound depth, the online magazine Smith asked readers to write the story of their own lives in a single sentence. The result is *Not Quite What I Was Planning*, a collection of six-word memoirs by famous and not-so-famous writers, artists and, musicians. Their stories are sometimes sad, often funny — and always concise.

The book is full of well-known names — from writer Dave Eggers (Fifteen years since last professional haircut), to singer Aimee Mann (Couldn't cope so I wrote songs), to comedian Stephen Colbert (Well, I thought it was funny). The collection has plenty of six-word insights from everyday folks as well: "Love me or leave me alone" was scrawled on a hand dryer in a public bathroom; a 27-year-old who had just been dumped penned "I still make coffee for two."

In order to write a successful six-word memoir, you— as the writer— need to tell a complete story in a very small amount of space. Since space is limited, each word must be well-chosen and thought upon. If you are successful, then anyone who reads your memoir will be able to imagine a deep and rich backstory. Remember, a six-word memoir should not be completely literal. For example, "I love to eat pepperoni pizza" leaves very little room for the reader to imagine about the life of the writer. It is simply a fact about a food that they like to mange on, and that is it. However, "Still likes to play with matches" lets the reader infer more interesting things about the author. Perhaps this is a big kid who never grew up. Maybe this person is a secret arsonist and they need to be locked up. Perhaps "matches" is not literal (it is a metaphor) and it can symbolize danger. Maybe this person likes to take risks. Perhaps they know that the way they choose to live their life is dangerous and that one day they may get "burned." Perhaps this person likes to destroy things, rather than to create them. Possibilities are endless.

Now it's your turn...

