Tips for Writing Your Changes Story

Free Yourself!
There’s no wrong way to do this. Don’t want to write a story or essay? Fine. Write a List, poem, dialogue with your younger self, Xcel spreadsheet or a photo caption.

Pick One Time or Place
Or maybe too much freedom is daunting. Describe one momentous occasion or experience that shaped you.

Leave Us Wanting More
Don’t try to tell the whole story. Think of this as a preview of a conversation you might have with someone at Reunion. Don’t try to cover all 50 years.

The Inner You
The cool part of Reunion is talking to people and learning how they think and feel. However you approach this, just be real. We’re too damn old to pose.

Writing Prompts to Get You Started

Well, I Never... Who imagined we’d be writing, uploading and reading each other’s stories on a phone? Tell us about one thing in your life that astonishes you today.

Borrow from something you’ve already written. Maybe you’ve already written something—a Facebook post, Christmas letter or email—most of us have never seen.

Compare and Contrast. Look at your Zoo Book pic and a more recent photo. What’s the difference between those two people?

My So-called Normal Life. Tell us why your life is not worth writing about. Be specific and cite data, photographic evidence and third parties.

My Unconventional Path. Was it a long and winding road to get somewhere or did aliens abduct you and set you down somewhere new?

My Most Emotional Moment. Tell us about something you experienced very deeply—a loss, good fortune, unexpected discovery, heart-rending decision.

Losing My Religion. Is that you in the corner, that you in the spotlight? Has your faith grown or withered, your politics changed color, your sense of self evolved?

To Whom it May Concern. Write a letter to someone, alive or dead, Carl or not. Confess, admonish, admire, apologize, or just plain reconnect.

My Random Playlist. Go to iTunes, Pandora station or wherever you keep your music. Shuffle. And then write about the first three or four tunes that pop up.
This Says a Lot About Me. Start with a favorite object, person, photo, place, movie, experience. Describe the reasons for your fandom.

Interview yourself. Make up your own questions or fill in the blank in the examples. Answer one in depth or make it a fun Q&A.

What have you done for the earth lately?
Not enough. We just added solar to our house, which already uses less energy than our neighbors. The array we put in is not going to eliminate our electric bill, but we stopped evaluating it as financial decision and made an investment in a cleaner future.

Our modest forays have shown us how hard it is to make impactful changes. Capitalism has to change course or we humans are all screwed. But we choose to be optimistic—or rather, do things that reflect optimism.

What books are on your nightstand?
I was an English major. I have three piles in the bedroom. On top of the bedside table dipping-before-sleep stack is You’ve Got to Read This: Contemporary American Writers Introduce Stories That Held Them in Awe. In 600 pages of greatness, I can usually find one or two things to read.

Under the table are books I’ve stalled out on but haven’t given up reading yet: Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present; biographies of Jack London and Leonard Cohen; and Closing Time, a lighthearted history of Twin Cities saloons, dives and watering holes.

On the dresser are books I have recently finished (Paying the Land, comics journalism about the ongoing collision of white colonialism and indigenous North Americans) or plan to read next (American Gospel, a rapture novel set in Minnesota).

What’s the deal with your haircut?
You mean lack of one? With the pandemic, I stopped cutting my own hair in reverse solidarity with all those people trying to cut theirs for the first time.

What would be your role in a zombie apocalypse movie?
I’d be one saying, “Has anyone tried talking to them, to understand their point of view?” And guys with the shotguns would just be rolling their eyes.

Name three people, living or dead, to be quarantined with.
As long as the dead ones arrive in their pre-deceased bodies, I’ll go with Dorothy Parker for wit, Harriet Tubman for inspiration and amazing stories, and Jesus, who the record shows was consistently chill in trying circumstances. If Dorothy insists on smoking, we’ll have an extra bunk for a surprise guest.