

Developing a Book Proposal for a Memoir of My Life

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Developing a Book Proposal for a Memoir of My Life

Colleen Dillon-Bartz

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Science

June 2004

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
International Center for Studies in Creativity

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Date of Approval:

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Colleen Dillon-Bartz, Candidate

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Dr. Mary C. Murdock, Advisor  
Professor, Buffalo State College  
International Center for Studies in  
Creativity

## Dedication

To my husband, Ken Bartz, without your love, support and encouragement I would not be where I am today. Thank you for allowing me to dream and helping me to make my dreams come true. I Love You!

## Acknowledgements

Dr. Murdock, Thank you for encouraging me to believe in myself and to go with my passion when I chose a project.

Susan Keller-Mathers, Thank you for your support of all my crazy creative unique ideas.

Aunt Ginney & Aunt Peggy, Thanks for all your support and encouragement of this project. Thanks for filling in as “mom”.

My sister Candy, Thank you for talking and crying with me. You make me proud to be your sister.

Edie, Thanks for putting up with me and my grammar. You are a friend and true supporter. I couldn't find a better editor.

Finally...To my Molly, Thank you for allowing me to work when you wanted to play. You are my inspiration and I Love You!

## Abstract

This project contains a description of the process used to develop a book proposal in developing my proposal I researched on a variety of books, in such categories as, self-help, inspirational and religious. After much consideration I used the memoir style to develop the proposal and chapters. The actual book proposal and first three chapters can be found in appendix A. I then research a variety of memoirs and developed a matrix to compare content. This matrix is discussed in the paper and can be found in the appendix C. Additional information is discussed in this project which include interviews with family members, journal writing and the creation of a book jacket that can be found in appendix B.

## **Table of Contents**

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Title page   | i       |
| Signature page   | ii      |
| Dedication   | iii     |
| Acknowledgements   | iv      |
| Abstract   | v       |
| Background to the project                                      | page 1  |
| Pertinent Literature   | page 3  |
| Bibliography   | page 5  |
| Process Plan   | page 7  |
| Outcomes   | page 10 |
| Key Learnings  | page 11 |
| References   | page 14 |
| Appendix A: Book proposal including three chapters of the book | page 15 |
| Appendix B: Book cover   | page 16 |
| Appendix C: Matrix chart                                       | page 17 |
| Appendix D: Concept paper                                      | page 18 |

## **Background to the Project**

My original idea for this project was to write a manuscript about the process of dealing with death. I realized that this was impossible to complete in one semester. After reviewing my options I decided to write a book proposal on the topic of dealing with illness and death. I was going to use my own personal experiences throughout my life to help other people deal with these difficult tragedies. As I researched different types of books, including inspirational and spiritual, I realized that the type of book I needed to develop was a memoir. This type of book would allow me to tell my story with out telling readers how to live their lives. Thus it could become a book of my life that could inspire other people with hope.

I started the process by researching a variety of book proposal layouts. There are many books and web sites that deal with creating book proposals. I wanted to be certain to choose a style that would enhance my understanding of the process and allow me to give an honest overview of my story. I finally settled on the proposal listed on the web site

<http://www.alderbooks.com/howto.html#TradeBkProp>. This proposal allowed me to create an annotated table of contents for each chapter of the book. I found this very helpful in organizing my thought process and the outline of my life experiences. This proposal also required a sample of the chapters for the book, information about the author, a summary and marketing

information. These were areas I could explore and work on to develop a greater understanding of the process for publication.

As I worked on researching other books, I began to keep a journal of stories, quotes and other information that I found pertinent in my exploration and travels. I then set up interviews with various family members. I wanted to tape open interviews with people that I thought could help unleash some memories of my past. These interviews were not organized with a list of direct questions, but were directed towards certain occurrences in my life that I wanted to generate more memory. I scheduled five interviews on various days with large blocks of uninterrupted time for everyone involved. The people chosen for the interviews were selected with two main criteria. First if they had participated in the events in which I wanted to discuss and second various age groups to gain a different perspective on the different events. I made certain that the family members I interviewed had a solid understanding of what my project was about and I explained how I expected the interview to flow with their thoughts and memories of the events being discussed.

Before I could develop a reason for marketing my book, I developed a matrix to compare what my book had to offer with memoirs that have already been published. A copy of this Matrix can be found in appendix C. I developed a list of attributes for my story and cross-checked the books that I had reviewed or read. This process allowed me to gain a solid foundation of what my book had to offer society compared to what is already published. This process also allowed me to identify the strongest attributes of my story,

which consisted of family, death, self-destruction, spiritual growth, adolescence and more.

This project opened up a whole new endeavor for me. I am not a writer. I am a designer and art teacher. I never thought of actually writing a book, but this was an opportunity to challenge my creativity in a different and unique way. I was challenged to learn and understand the process of developing a book proposal. I was creatively challenged to write my story in a fashion that would relate to other people. I had to learn how to creatively write a story that would keep readers interested and draw them into the next chapter. I wanted to create a story that would help other people deal with similar challenges of their own life.

### **Pertinent Literature**

I needed to study three distinct areas in researching information about this project. The first was researching book proposals, the second was memoirs and the third was creative writing and grammar. Each area was distinct with a specific purpose in enhancing different areas of this project.

There are many different types of book proposals and ways of getting information on book proposals. I found actual books on how to write a book proposal written by publishing companies or people that developed a generic form of book proposal. I looked on the Internet and find various web sites that give an outline for book proposals. Sometimes these web sites are free, others ask for donations and some need memberships. There are a lot of different types of book proposals non-fiction, fiction and computer generated. They are all similar, but depending on the type of book

being written will determine what book proposal is chosen. I chose a non-fiction one because a memoir is a true story. Submitting a book proposal for publication may vary depending on the publishing guidelines. A bibliography is at the end of this section for a list of web sights on book proposals.

I did several searches to find a variety of memoirs that have been written. I conducted ERIC searches using the key word “Memoirs.” I did web searches on Amazon.com and I went directly into bookstores to see what is new and on the best seller list. I found that there are thousands of memoirs with topics ranging from anorexia to the World Wars. The matrix in appendix C lists over twenty-five memoirs and that was just the beginning of the memoirs that I looked at for this project. I tried to find some related to my topic and some that were totally different. This research was very important in helping direct the topic flow of my book. I wanted to make sure that the book I was proposing was different and unique from the publications already out.

When it comes to creative writing and grammar, I am very weak. I was surprised to find so many books on creative writing listed in the Creative Studies Library . I was also lucky to find a newly published book called *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* (Truss 2004). This was an easy read that has helped me understand the grammar process better. As an extra bonus in helping me develop my creative writing and grammar skills, my cousin was kind enough to proof read my written chapters. This I consider an extra bonus because she has majored in English Literature. Therefore I think that I chose a great editor for my book.

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### **Process Plan and Time Line**

To begin the process of creating this Master's project I needed to decide what I wanted to do. Originally I had three very distinct ideas. I could create a rubric for art teacher's using Bessemer's product criteria, I could write a book to tell my story or I could develop a curriculum portfolio in art. All three of my ideas were inspiring for me, but I had passion for the idea of telling my story.

After deciding what I wanted to do and presenting it to my professor, I needed to create a concept paper explaining how I was going to complete my project. I understood very quickly that the idea of writing a book was great, but also too broad. I reassessed my concept paper and reviewed the information with my professor. I decided that writing a book proposal was more realistic. I then researched a variety of book proposals and found one that would best help me understand the process of writing a book for publication <http://www.alderbooks.com/howto.html#TradeBkProp>. I then reformatted my concept paper to encompass the process of writing a book proposal (Bartz, 2004, see appendix a). This included the idea that I would continue and finish writing the complete book manuscript in the future. The whole process of choosing a topic, researching book proposals and writing my concept paper took about forty hours.

The next step was to create a first draft outline for my book. I originally did this in a normal outline form. I then made arrangements to conduct interviews with various family members to

help stimulate my memories of the past. I did not want to over stimulate my memories, so I spread the interviews over a period of a month. I also arranged to have large blocks of time set aside to meet with the people being interviewed. The interview process was suppose to take 20 hours, but the time was extended because my family members wanted to talk more. The final time for the interviews was extended to 80 hours. The interview sessions are on tape and for my personal use in my book, so they are not included in the final write up of the project.

As I organized all the steps that needed to occur to complete this project, I began a journal. This journal ultimately became the mainstay of my project. I would write notes and quotes as I found pertinent information in my travels. I also started writing on scrap paper if I did not have my journal handy; that way I would not lose or forget any information. It got so intense that I had two journals, one at my bedside and one in my everyday bag. I should have had a small one for my purse, but I have not done that yet. Journaling is averaged out to approximately 50 hours.

I wrote the first chapter of my book before I interviewed any family members. I wasn't really sure what to expect with my writing and the interviews. The most profound process that occurred in creating this project was the interviews. This was when I realized that I was writing a memoir of my life. Originally I thought I was writing a self-help or inspirational book, but I wasn't. It occurred to me as I conducted the interviews that my story was the creative mechanism for other people to cope with tragedy. My family members encouraged my writing and challenged me to extend the

content of my story. They reminded me of things that I had forgotten about and they helped me make connections that I had not considered. I was so very glad that I taped these interviews as a means for me to reflect back as I write. The people I interviewed also want to continue the conversations as I dig deeper into the chapters. Now that I have interviewed five family members I hope to open up the interview process to more people that I believe could contribute in my writing process.

I started researching the various books needed to help me with the creative writing process as soon as I decided on a topic for my Master's project. I never stopped looking for books or sources. I am still looking today. People continually tell me about other references that I can look at. There are so many references that it has been an on-going process to examine and explore all the information that is out in publication. I constantly find new sources to help me in my creative writing endeavor. Research for this project added up to twenty to twenty five hours.

When I had completed a good amount of research and the interviews I had scheduled were completed, I did a final annotated outline of each chapter for my book proposal. I had the original outline, but it did not give an honest understanding of what my book was really about. Using annotations for each chapter really developed the story and flow of the book. It allowed me to grasp the main context of what I really wanted to say with out over simplifying. Writing the book proposal and the first three chapters with edits took over eighty hours.

The final last of this project was to write the final book proposal. I took all the information I had and went through the book proposal form step by step. When I came to the area of marketing I reviewed all the notes I had on the memoirs I had researched. I then developed a list of qualities that my book possessed and created a comparative matrix on the books I had reviewed. This process really allowed me to understand the differences in the content of my book compared to the books already published. I then finished the book proposal by completing a final edited copy of the first three chapters of the book.

I kept my journal and tapes as private records that I could refer to as I continue to write my complete manuscript. As part of a presentation to my CRS 690 class I developed a book jacket (see appendix B). The jacket included a summary of the book information about the author and key information that I learned. As I designed the jacket, I also realized the importance of a title for my book. I had been kicking this idea around and the same title kept coming up. At first I thought it was too crass, but I realized it really reflects the whole idea of the book. I finally titled it *Life Sucks, Smile Anyway*.

### **Outcomes**

I have two solid outcomes from this project. The first is a completed book proposal which includes an annotated outline of each chapter for the book and three edited and completed chapters. The second is a matrix, which was completed to have a clear understanding of the uniqueness of my story compared to others. I

also have a designed book jacket that is being submitted, but was not originally planned as part of the Master's project.

A copy of all the work is submitted in CD form except for the matrix. A copy of the matrix will be found in the Appendix

### **Key Learnings**

I learned a great deal from the entire process of creating this project. I learned in the beginning what a challenge it is to choose a project and to follow your passion. The creation and research involved in developing my book proposal project was also a challenge, but with the passion deep in me the challenge became a fulfilling experience. I was very afraid to challenge my self in an area in which I was not certain or knowledgeable. I had never thought of myself as a writer. I thought a writer had to possess special skills that I knew nothing about. After challenging myself with this project, I feel comfortable calling myself author.

I am not saying that the process was easy; it was very challenging. The things that worked best for me started with choosing a project for which I had passion. I felt very strongly about the story I had to tell and having the opportunity to creatively express it was a goal in my life that I was thrilled to take. Not knowing where to start became much easier when I researched and found a book proposal that was structured in a form in which I was comfortable working

(<http://www.alderbooks.com/howto.html#TradeBkProp>). This specific book proposal gave me an outline to follow, but challenged me to dig deeper into my story than I originally intended. I also had positive experiences with the family interviews. I was very cautious

at first about whom I was going to ask for an interview. I wanted the people to be open and willing to discuss topics that were not necessarily positive aspects of their lives. It turned out that the people I chose were more than positive; they were encouraging.

I have the most difficulty in writing the three chapters and completing the final annotated outlines. Not that I would change any part of the process, but I did learn that reflecting on tragic areas of your past is very emotional. I did not expect this to happen, and I learned to take baby steps. I would write a little and if the emotions were getting overwhelming I would stop and take a break. I realized that I was putting my mind back in time, and I was feeling the depth of the emotions all over again. When I realized that this was happening, I did not stop. I just decided that it was easier to do it a little at a time. I wanted my story to reflect the emotional challenges that I had as a child. I kept the voice of the writer struggling between a child's voice and an adult voice. This was done to express the emotional challenge of not wanting to grow up before my time and being forced to take on adult situations. As my story goes on the child's voice will dissipate and the adult control voice will take over.

I had some problems with the overall project. At one point I ran out of audiotapes. I learned very quickly to buy large packs and bring them with me. I also had a problem where one of the audio tapes broke at the end. I thought it was still taping, but it wasn't. I learned to continually check the time and the tape player to make sure they were running properly.

As a writer there were many areas that I did not realize that I needed to focus on. I didn't realize that I needed to choose an audience or that I needed to create a voice for my character. At first I thought I was writing some form of specialty book, but I couldn't say specifically what type of book it was. I kept looking at self-help, spiritual and inspirational books for my research. It wasn't until I was speaking to my cousin that I realized I was going in the wrong direction. She kept asking me who my audience was and what type of book was it. Then after I was interviewing my aunt and I was explaining what I was trying to do I realized I was writing my memoir. If I had done a little more research in the beginning on creative writing, I could have answered this question earlier. Then I reworked the first chapter and realized my audience was older teenagers and adults.

This may be the end of my project, but it is just the beginning of my work. I have gained knowledge so much about creative writing and how to put together a book proposal. I have also learned that the creative process extends into all aspects of my life. The realization that I needed to incubate or converge and diverge at various points of this project was enlightening.

As I continue to work on my book , many of the creativity tools I have learned will come in very handy when I have to edit. I have already diverged to create an annotated outline so I can illuminate all the stories that I remember in my life. This process will not end until I have completed the manuscript. Then I will be able to reflect on all the stories and edit the most pertinent and eliminate the others.

I plan to finish my manuscript and send out my book proposal to a variety of publishers. I hope that my story will be picked up by a publication, so I can share it with other people. Even if it is not published, I want to complete it as a process of healing for me.

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Appendix A: Book proposal including three chapters of the book

## Appendix B: Book cover

## Appendix C: Matrix chart

## Appendix D: Concept paper

## Concept for Book Proposal

Name: Colleen Bartz Date Submitted: Feb. 7, 2004

Project Type: I will be completing a book proposal for the publication of a book that will help people through the process of loss, death and grief in a positive way. I will accomplish this through my own personal story.

### **What is This Project About:**

This project is a planning stage for a book that I will be writing. This book is based on a historical overview of my life and how I have dealt with the issue of illness and death within my family. I have personally endured the hardships and positive growth of dealing with tragic sickness and loss. I have survived through many illnesses and deaths with a positive attitude; this attitude can be contributed to creativity skills and concepts. I believe that I can convey through my personal story a resource for people who have difficulty dealing with sickness and death.

### **Rational for Choice:**

I chose this skill because many people have asked me how I have survived the many painful deaths in my family. To understand this one must have knowledge of my history living with death. I remember the first time a close friend of mine passed away when I was eight. After that I have lost many close people in my family from tragic death to cancer. My father was a fireman who suddenly died in the line of duty and in 1998 I lived through a string of cancer deaths starting with my mother-in-law, sister-in-law, son and finally my mother. I have a great degree of passion for this subject not only because I have lost many relatives, but also because I believe our purpose in life is to survive, go on and be happy. I believe this because the way I was raised and the skills my father left me for dealing with the subject of death.

### **What Will Be the Tangible Product(s) or Outcomes:**

- Book proposal
- Outline of book
- Three completed chapters (stories)
- Research of other books, references and publishers
- Interview of four family members
- A journal of thoughts and quotes

### **What Criteria Will You Use To Measure the Effectiveness of Your Achievement:**

- That the book proposal is completed and ready for submission to my chosen publisher.
- A draft outline is completed, but may be changed if needed.
- Three chapters are written and proofread twice with the corrections completed.
- I have researched and found a publisher for my type of book.
- I have researched other books that are similar to mine and that I will complete a paired comparison analysis of them and my own idea.
- I have researched books on creative writing, which will reflect in the ability of my own writing skills as my story progress.
- I will keep a journal to maintain my thoughts and quotes throughout the duration of the project.
- I will interview five family members and record their memories of the events that occurred throughout my life that I might not have remembered. They may also give me a different perspective on the situations that took place.

### **Who Will Be Involved or Influenced; What Will Your Role Be:**

I believe my entire family will be influenced with the outcome of my work. I do not plan on allowing them to read it until I am finished, but I believe that it will bring us closer. I have a cousin who has been a great influence on me. She has helped me through a lot and supports my idea for this book. She will be someone that I can count on for reviews, proof reading and cheerleading. Rita will

be my buddy for black board. She is a great person with a totally different perspective and I am really grateful for her help and opinion. I will be the person writing the book. It is my job to do the research and to maintain a schedule for myself to complete my project. I will also be counting on the people in the CRS 690 class to be open and giving with information, opinions and critiques. I believe that they are a strong group that may keep me grounded through conversations and blackboard.

### **When will this project take place:**

The completion of the book is long term, but the project as I have outlined will be completed by May. I have already started my stories, the outline and the journal. I have not completed enough research at this point, but I anticipate digging deeper by mid March. I will be organizing interviews with my family during the month of April. I will also have my stories proofread by then with everything coming together by my last class in May.

### **Where will this project occur:**

The written portion of this project will take place in my home located in Eden, New York. The interviews will take place either at my home or my relatives homes located in Western New York. I will conduct my research over the Internet, in the public library system and in the SUNY library system.

### **Why is it important to do this:**

This book is not for me. It is for all the people in the world that have lost a loved one and then lose there lust for life. This book is being written to break down some of the old taboos that surround the subject of death and dying. People have such a great fear of death that they avoid people who are dying or the people who are mourning a death. People don't know what to say or how to act because society has not allowed them to understand death. When we speak of death, people think of their own mortality. The reality is we will all die and life should not be wasted on a fear we have no ownership over. Death of a loved one is sad because we will no

longer be able to see that person or spend time with that person, but if we live our lives with that idea in mind, we would make every moment a special moment as if it were the last. Life can be so much better! When other people read my book I hope they go through the rest of there live living and loving the people around them. I hope that people care for the dying and families grow close to fill the void of the person that will be passing to a place were love only exists.

### **Personal Learning Goals:**

- I hope to develop my research skills better. I need to research a variety of topics.
- I hope to develop my writing skills better and I will need to learn more about creative writing to do this.
- I hope to become less judgmental on self-help books because I tend to cringe when I read them.
- I hope to let my guard down and allow people to look at my work and critique it. I hope not to be defensive with critiques.

### **How do you plan to achieve your Goals and Outcomes:**

I will be exploring many Internet sites and libraries to research information pertaining to the subjects of grieving, death, and hospice. I will also explore these sites to find information on creative writing. I hope to read or at least skim through books that my help build my skills in creative writing. I plan to talk with people about my project to try and understand other views on the subject area. I also plan to have people read my stories and complete an evaluation form to get a review of their thoughts.

### **Evaluation:**

I will use this concept paper as a checklist for completing the things I need to have done. I will maintain my time line every week to make certain the work I have assigned my self will be completed. Wen it comes to evaluating the stories I write I will be the first evaluator. When I have completed a story I will put it away for a few days and then I will review and make changes. My second level of

evaluation will be Rita. I would like to give her a critique sheet to follow. This will allow her to read what I have written and to answer specific questions regarding my work. She will also be allowed to add personal comments at the end. The third level of evaluation will be myself to rework my story using the information Rita offered. The fourth level of evaluation will be my cousin Edie. She will be honest clear and direct (She's also great with grammar). She is almost like an editor and I am comfortable with her critique method. If I feel more feedback is needed I may turn to a professor to review my work.

### **Prepare project timeline:**

(Every day write in your journal)

- Now start writing thoughts, ideas and quotes as they come and continue for the duration.
- By February 13, 2004 have research of creative writing techniques started.
- By February 21, 2004 have a few books on self-help to read through.
- By February 29, 2004 have idea chapters set up on the computer with list of story ideas. Add to as needed.
- By March 13, 2004 have research on publishers started.
- By March 18, 2004 have outline of book drafted.
- By March 28, 2004 have at two stories completed and proofread by me. Ask Rita to read and evaluate them. See if she can finish in a week.
- April 1, 2004 complete a paired comparison of books researched.
- First week of April interview family member.
- By April 5, 2004 review and assess work returned by Rita and send off to Edie. Get back with in a week.
- Second week of April interview second relative.
- By April 9, 2004 have first draft of book proposal completed.
- Third week of April interview 3<sup>rd</sup> relative.
- By April 13, 2004 have Rita read third story of book.
- By April 17, 2004 complete first two stories for book.
- By April 23, 2004 have Edie Proofread work.
- Fourth week of April interview 4<sup>th</sup> relative.

- By April 30, 2004 review 1 the work you have completed so far and make a draft of how you see the book being laid out chapter by chapter.
- By May 1, 2004 have final draft of book proposal completed.
- By May 3<sup>rd</sup> complete third story of book.
- By May 5, 2004 have work organized to hand in as a project.
- By May 5, 2004 have book proposal completed to submit to a publisher.
- Over summer continue work as before completing stories to be woven into chapters.
- By August 28, 2005 have all chapters of the book completed

### **Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources:**

The literature and resources will consist of:

- Self-help books dealing with the subject of death and dying.
- The Holy Bible
- Music By Harry Chapin, Eric Clapton, Judy Garland, Louis Armstrong, Mamma Cas, and more
- CBIR & ERIC
- I may speak with people that have lost loved one.
- I may speak to people at Hospice.
- I may speak with family members.
- I will be looking up books on creative writing
- Various web sites on publishing
- Find book “Jan’s Rainbow” by Lindsey Collier
- SUNY library system
- Erie county library system