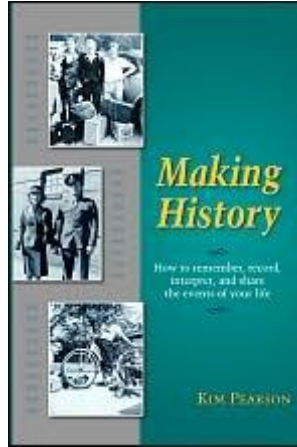


A Conversation With Kim Pearson Author of *Making History: How to remember, record, interpret and share the events of your life*



Author: Kim Pearson

ISBN: 978-1-932279-75-7

6-21-2007

Today, Norm Goldman, Publisher & Editor of Bookpleasures.com is pleased to have as our guest, Kim Pearson, author of *Making History: How to remember, record, interpret and share the events of your life*.

Good day Kim and thanks for participating in our interview.

Norm:

Please tell our readers a little bit about your personal and professional background. I understand you are a ghostwriter, author and teacher.

Kim:

I've been writing since I was a little girl, and my dream was always to be a writer. I have degrees in English Literature and History, which I pursued because I thought they'd help me in a writing career. However, for most of my working life I held various marketing positions in the world of high-tech, and only wrote "on the side." It wasn't until I began writing memoirs for other people (I began with my own grandmother) that I realized that I could actually do this as a career.

From writing memoirs I went on to teaching others how to write their own (*Making History* is based on one of my classes) and then I went on to ghostwriting non-fiction books on business, self-help, spirituality, and a lot of other diverse subjects. Along the

way I also managed to write some books of my own – fiction and poetry as well as my own non-fiction. And of course I still write memoirs for others – that is my favorite kind of ghostwriting.

Norm:

What keeps you writing?

Kim:

Writing is how I define myself. If I'm not writing, something is missing. Sometimes, though, I do go through those awful blank spells when I'm sure I've run out of anything new to say, and I feel like chucking the whole thing. What keeps me writing through those times are the writing practices I've established – every morning I write three pages of longhand "compost" (that means anything that comes out of my pen is okay, even if it's boring and trivial) and I also write one haiku poem every morning. It doesn't have to be a *good* haiku; my only criteria are that it's 3 lines and 17 syllables. After I write those two pieces, even if I spend the whole day staring at the blank computer screen, I know I am still a writer.

Norm:

Whom do you believe will benefit from *Making History: How to remember, record, interpret and share the events of your life and why?*

Kim:

I originally started teaching the class in senior centers or retirement complexes, mostly to people in their 70s. They were being pestered by their children and grandchildren to "write it down" and share stories of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. I was blown away by the complexity, wisdom, and beauty in their stories, all the humor, all the tragedy – and the courage they showed in revealing their lives and the lessons they had learned. And they motivated me to share my stories of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, when I was a child and young adult. This made me realize that my generation, we infamous baby-boomers, were the ones my class (and book) was really targeted toward. Our elders are getting ready to leave, and we ourselves are coming up on old. We need and want our elders' stories, and we need and want to tell our own to our children's generation. One of the most common remarks I hear when people see my book is "I wish I had this book while Grandma/Grandpa/Dad/Mom/Aunt Susie/Etc., was alive." Because the truth is, when you die your stories die too -- unless you have written them down. *Making History* gives you the tools you need to remember and preserve your stories for future generations.

I think there are four main reasons it is important that we share our stories:

1) Our stories connect us to each other, to the future, and to the past. We are all a part of history; we are actors, not just reactors, and we are also witnesses. 2) Our stories pass along our wisdom; all good teachers know

that the best way to teach someone is not to preach at them, but to tell them a story. 3) Our stories inspire each other – when we tell a story in which we (or someone else) acted with compassion, bravery, creativity, perseverance, dignity, etc. – then we have proved that it is possible, and we can inspire others to do the same. 4) Our stories heal each other – and ourselves – by enabling us to understand and forgive.

Family historians, genealogists, scrapbookers, antique enthusiasts, and anyone interested in the past can also benefit from this book because it can help them fill in the stories that go with the dates and places they have already uncovered.

Norm:

What kind of research did you do to write this book?

Kim:

Because *Making History* is not a true history book, but contains a compilation of historical events acting as memory triggers, it was not necessary for me to do a lot of in-depth scholarly research. Most of my research for the timelines was done via the internet and reading reference books, cross-checking facts, and so on. The rest of the book is based on many personal stories, my own and the participants in my classes. I taught this memoir writing class for nearly 5 years before I wrote the book based on the class, and the class itself evolved over time – more stories, more subjects, more facts gathered. So I guess you could say it took 5 years of research to write the book.

Norm:

During the past several years there seems to be an increase in the number of published memoirs? Is this a valid observation and if so why?

Kim:

Yes, I think it is valid. Memoir is one of the hottest book genres today. There's a great deal of interest in real-life personal stories – I think that's also why "reality TV" is so popular now. Genealogy is the second-largest hobby in the US, and websites like "Ancestry.com" are some of the most visited on the web. These are all about personal stories, the stories of our own families.

Why is this? – my personal opinion is that people in our culture feel lost, alone, and disconnected from their communities today. We are desperate to find sources for community, and when we watch "real people" on TV or read their stories in books, we identify with them – look, they are just like us. People also feel helpless today, in the face of giant problems like war, global warming, epidemics of disease, and so on. It's tempting to sink into despair and apathy – what difference does one life make?

But when we read real stories of real people that include struggles and

difficulties, triumph as well as failure, we are acknowledging that real people did and can make a difference in the world. And so can we. It's very empowering.

Norm:

What has been your overall experience as a published author?

Kim:

I often tell my clients that if they want to write a book in order to become rich and famous, they should probably think of another way of getting rich and famous. Being a published author has not brought me fame or pots of money, although it does help to pay the rent. Mostly, it has brought me a great deal of pride and satisfaction.

If 100 years from now, my great-great-great grandchild is reading something I wrote, it might even have brought me a measure of immortality. The most practical benefit I got from being a published author is that it opened doors in helping me to establish my business and my reputation as a ghostwriter and writing teacher.

Norm:

What's your advice to achieve success as a writer?

Kim:

You know, when I was writing my own "stuff," I couldn't make enough money to quit my day job and be a writer full time. It wasn't until I started writing for other people that I was able to go out on my own. There's a lesson in there somewhere – I think it is: "It's not about you." Even when you write your own stuff, it still isn't about you -- it's always about your readers. If there weren't any readers, there'd be no point in writing. Writing is just another way of communicating; but writing allows you to communicate without the restrictions of time and space. I think if you keep "it's not about you" in front of you all the time, you can't go far wrong. The other piece of advice is "Don't give up." I was nearly 50 when I started this new career.

Norm:

What is it like being a ghost writer? Why do people hire ghost writers?

Kim:

I love being a ghostwriter. I feel so honored that people share their stories, ideas, and dreams with me, and trust me to present them in a way that will be true to them and compelling to readers. And I get to hear such great stories! (I *love* stories.)

People hire ghostwriters because 1) they don't have time to write a book; 2) they don't know how to write a book, or they think they have no talent for

writing; and/or 3) they hate to write – some people would rather clean the toilet than write. But even though one of these three reasons is stopping them from writing a book, they still have a great story to tell, or an exciting idea to explain, or they've discovered a new and better way of doing XYZ that will help millions, or they want to promote their business or themselves as an authority. Just because someone's not a writer doesn't mean they don't have great ideas and stories that deserve to be written down – and written well.

Norm:

What do you consider your first "break" as a writer?

Kim:

It came after I wrote my grandmother's memoir, which I did for 3 reasons – 1) love for my grandmother; 2) to record a bit of family history for my two daughters and any future grandchildren; and 3) to see if I had the ability to write a memoir.

I was pretty happy with the way it turned out; I illustrated it with old photos and "published" it (actually I did the printing and binding and everything myself) and made four copies – one for me, two for my daughters, and one for Grandma. Grandma liked hers a lot so she showed it off to all her friends. One of these friends asked if she could borrow it.

Well, when this friend had the borrowed copy at her house, her niece came over for a visit, saw the book, and liked it so much that she tracked down my grandmother, got my name and number, called me and asked me if she could hire me to write a book about her mother. It was my first ghostwriting commission, and although I charged her a laughably small sum in dollars, it gave me the idea and belief that I could make my living as a writer.

Norm:

How important is it for aspiring writers to go to conferences? How do you know that a conference is worth your time and money? Do you attend these conferences?

Kim:

I think conferences are worthwhile because you get to mingle with other people who are all as nuts as you are about writing. For a little while you get to feel normal. But the big reason is that when you go to a writer's conference you are "showing up" as a writer. You are giving a tangible demonstration to the universe that you are a **Writer**. You are making a declaration of intent, and that's pretty powerful.

As to how you know a conference will be worth your time and money – I don't know the answer to that. I've been to conferences that I wasn't initially excited about, but when there I met someone or discovered something that illuminated my life. I've also been to

conferences that I was excited about attending, and they didn't live up to my expectations. It is very hard to predict, but I find that if you are open to people and possibilities, you will more than likely go home energized, and maybe a little wiser than before.

Writing conferences are about showing up. It's like those lottery advertisements – "you don't win if you don't play." So yes, I go to them (even when I don't want to.)

Norm:

Is there anything else you wish to add that we have not covered and what is next for Kim Pearson?

Kim:

I hope what's next is more of the same. I'm happy doing what I'm doing. I want to continue ghostwriting books for others, books that will contribute something good and meaningful to the world.

And I want to continue writing my own books – right now I'm working on three of them, all very different. One that's nearly done is about a dog and her visits to the dog park (sort of a doggy soap opera), one that I've just started about the masks we wear while searching for our true identity, and another that I can't yet describe – right now it's just a collection of notes on an idea simmering steadily in the back of my brain.

Thanks once again and good luck with all of your future endeavors.