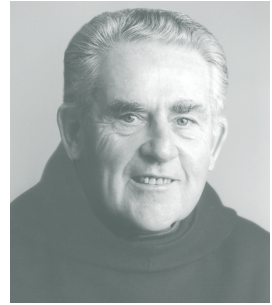


Memoirs

By brother John

MEMOIRS MAY WELL BE THE FAVORED WRITING terrain for older persons. No doubt memory plays a central role in memoir. Yet memory seems to play more tricks as we age. We begin to forget so easily—of course it can happen at any age, but eventually it seems inevitable. And besides that, we sometimes remember things we prefer to forget. What we do remember, we are inclined to paint grandly with new details. Order, the sequence of facts and dates and figures, all take on a face of their own in our maturing memories.



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So, why the attraction to writing memoirs as life moves on? In a memoir, the bonds and constraints of objectivity, of a rigid and demanding memory, are loosened. Memoir does not neglect the real. It recalls past events more freely, perhaps more simply, certainly more personally. It shines a different focus on reality. It requires of the reader a wink toward details that are missed, a nod toward what is added, a smile when it seems a little confused. From both sides—writer and reader—memoir engages a sense of perspective, a sense of humor, a practice of humility. The gift of memoir brings life to memory—it brings memory to life. Hopefully a memoir becomes living memory.

Like all human activities, memoir has its dangers and pitfalls. They are rooted in that extraordinary faculty of memory. Memory does not stand on its own. It reflects the perspective of the one who remembers. When we remember while clinging to the past, when we hanker for the good old days, we wind up at a dead end in nostalgia. When we remember with bitterness and resentment, we end up with a deathly brew of toxins. When we remember with fear and terror, we flee to another world of fantasy or violence. Not every memoir is a living memory. There are so many traps when we are unaware of our perspective, of how we remember!

It need not be so. Memory may be gracious. Memory may come from the perspective of gratitude and hope. With awareness of our perspective we just might choose to write a memoir that playfully lifts one another up and helps us to move beyond the past to live more fully in the present. Such are the possibilities for gift and life when we are aware and when we choose. ☒