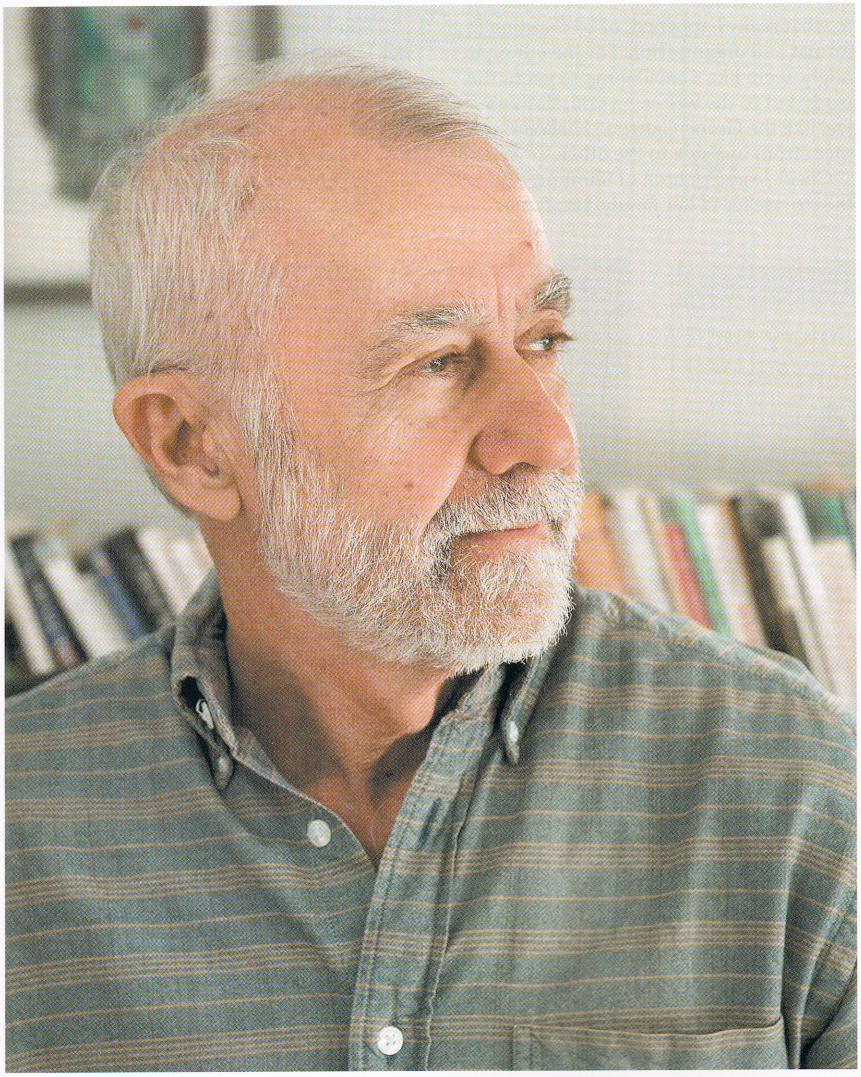
Memories to Memoirs

Lisbon Falls-based business helps people capture moments in time



By Ruth DeCoster

Denis Ledoux is a writer who believes *everyone* has a story; his calling is to help people capture them and write them down. "There are interesting stories in many ordinary lives," he said of his passion.

As the owner of Soleil Lifestory Network in Lisbon Falls – a business that helps everyday people turn memories into published memoirs through workshops, coaching sessions and publishing advice – Ledoux acts as editor, writing coach and even co-author when applicable.

"I give (clients) the tools to organize their stories," said Ledoux of his position. "I oftentimes give them a mission to tell their story."

The purpose behind writing a memoir can vary from person to person, but most often it's to record a past that is gone or to share how one worked through a painful struggle or situation – becoming an almost therapeutic experience for the writer. The narrative usually answers the "how" and "why" of something the person did, and explains what their response was to that experience through the art of storytelling.

Edward L. Kallup Jr. of Wayne had already written the first draft of his travels through Europe during the 1950s when he read about Ledoux's business and gave him a call. "He was extremely helpful to me," Kallup recalled. He particularly appreciated Ledoux's informal work process and honesty. "You immediately know he's genuine. He has your best interest at heart."

Kallup's book, *On to Paris We Sped,* was published in 2009. He credits both the editing expertise he received and the book production services – including design and printing – provided by the Maine business for helping turn intangible memories into a tangible book he can share with others.

"My role is to gently give them permission to write their own story," Ledoux humbly said of his teaching methods.

Before establishing Soleil Lifestory Network in 1988, Ledoux was a teacher who wrote fiction on the side. When he began to market and share his collection of autobiographical fiction, *What Became of Them and Other Stories from Franco-America,* he heard an outpouring from people who also wanted to share their stories. Their keen interest in his chronicles led him to offer

Left: *Owner of Soleil Lifestory Network Denis Ledoux helps people create memoirs from the stories of their lives. Amy Root-Donle photo*

his first "Turning Memories into Memoirs" workshop, where he guided new writers through the process – from urging them to write down as many individual memories as possible and fleshing out the details to organizing, revising and editing their work.

Over the years more advanced workshops were added to help writers combine individual sections or stories into a longer, more cohesive manuscript, while learning more intricate writing techniques addressing voice, tone, symbolism and imagery. In addition to the workshops, Ledoux also offers ghost-writing services for people who want to share their stories but don't want to be the writer behind the book. Ledoux will take the person's stories and weave them together into a memoir for the individual.

Pricing ranges from a series of 90-minute conference call workshops with goals such as "how to write your first draft" starting at $600, to one-on-one coaching services reaching $2,000 a year. "Editing depends on where they're at in the project," he said, generally ranging from $2,000 for light editing to $5,000 for intensive re-writes.

For those who are more independent, Ledoux advises they pick up a copy of his book *Turning Memories into Memoirs – A Handbook for Writing Lifestories,* an instructional guide he wrote in 1992, which he refers to as his "portable workshop" on memoir writing.

Clients of Soleil Lifestory Network come from all over the U.S. and Canada, some in person to attend workshops offered at the Lisbon Falls location, others via the internet or phone where "tele-classes" (conference-call-based seminars) are held to coach the potential writer along. He even has a network of affiliate teachers who lead memoir writing workshops in such locales as Jamaica, Australia, Ireland and Japan that he trained and provided with a detailed curriculum based on his own seminars at Soleil. "It was a natural flow," he said of the endeavor.

He helps clients tell their story in the most effective way possible, whether that is pointing out the authenticity of a story by encouraging the writer to stop telling the "nice" version of the tale and to dig in to what really happened, or by assisting in format and organization. For the editor, it might seem like a small jump to get to the truth, but to the writer, he said, "it might feel like the Grand Canyon." His job is to get them from one side to the other.

Client Jean Crichton of Summit, N.J., is the storyteller in her family. Her father was born in 1882 and she found that she had many family stories that interested her from his life, but she was overwhelmed with the initial complexities of the writing project. "Partly because (he) died when I was only eight years old, I've always wanted to know about the older people in the family," said Crichton. "I'm basically a person who likes to hold on to the past."

With Ledoux's guidance through a week-long course, Crichton pared down the messy jumble of too many stories and ideas into one workable piece about her father's life as a successful owner of a coal mining operation in Pennsylvania. The 96-page *Digging For Treasure –Two Pioneer Coal Developers in Portage, Pennsylvania* was published in 2009. Crichton said Ledoux "helped me shave it down to size." Her collaboration continues with Soleil Lifestory Network as she has begun work on a new book, and has ideas incubating for a third.

If you have a desire to share your memories with others, Ledoux has simple advice: "Don't wait too long. Anybody can write a story. Just get it down on paper. Any place you want to start. It can be re-ordered later. Just write!" And if you need help, Soleil Lifestory Network is there.

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