

# Editorial Autobiography

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It may seem like cheating to revise your autobiography since it is presumed to be a factual narrative of your life, but even honest autobiography is historical fiction. Everyone has a large portfolio of autobiographical clips that we regularly insert into our conversational stream; and into our own stream of consciousness as well. These clips range from sound bites that highlight one of our characteristics or experiences, to epic tales that purport to tell our life story and its meaning. Everyone can spontaneously tell a version of their life story in either 20 minutes or 2 hours, whether they think they are prepared to do this or not. I know this because I get both versions back to back at the start of each new counseling relationship.

Without asking, I usually get a 20 minute version sometime during the first half of our first session. Most people who consult with a psychologist feel the need to explain why they are doing that. Outside the barbed wire fences of managed care, which I am careful to avoid, this is unnecessary because the explanation emerges organically from the conversation. What I usually hear is a *spontaneous* 20 minute autobiography blended with a *prepared* explanation for coming to see me.

I am not a passive counselor, but during the initial session I try to provide as little feedback or direction as possible. I use the initial session to establish rapport and then I ask for a 2 hour autobiography. Some people say they can't provide this, but everyone can and easily does. It is useful to compare the 20 minute version with the 2 hour version because they can be substantially different in both substance and tone, *especially as it relates to the issues that are really disturbing them*. Recognition of these differences makes it clear that there is fiction in the autobiography somewhere. In a sense, the counseling process consists of rooting out problematic autobiographical fictions and editing the whole into something more shapely, effective, and true.

## ***Relief, Recovery, Resolution***

*Primarily for men and adolescent males in transition and in crisis,  
and for women who want to understand them better*

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