

How to Write Your Story When It Involves Other People

How do you incorporate someone into your story without compromising your integrity? How do you publish a book that involves other people? What if there is sensitive information that needs to be shared for the story to make sense?

These are questions I've received many times through the years and therefore decided to create a blog post on the topic.

DISCLAIMER: I am not an intellectual property lawyer (nor any other kind of lawyer) and this blog post should not be taken as legal advice or permission.

First of all, relationships are important. So be careful not to burn any bridges by what you write. Therefore, I recommend when at all possible, get permission in writing to use their story. Often an email will be sufficient, but if you can have them sign a consent form that's the best option.

One of our members, Jennifer Waddle, has shared that she even asks permission from her children to share funny stories that include them. This gets their buy-in and they have always allowed her to share the story.

There are two things you will need to consider. Defamation and invasion of privacy. Defamation is when you publish false information about a person. I assume none of you will be doing this but I needed to include it. Invasion of privacy is when you publish something that harms the other person's reputation.¹

What are your options when your story includes other people?

Here are some suggestions.

1. First, pray and ask God for wisdom.
2. Focus on YOUR story.
 - Write about your emotional responses.
 - Share your reaction and how you walked through the situation.

¹ See more information on this here: <https://helensedwick.com/how-to-use-real-people-in-your-writing>

- How did God work in your life? I always try to focus on the healing and hope found in Christ when I share my story.
3. Share the story but change the facts.
 - Change any identifying features of the person. Again, ask God for wisdom.
 - Don't include real names
 - Physical features
 - Life history (job, relationship to you, etc.)
 - Basically, make the person unrecognizable.
 4. Write it as a fiction novel.
 - I know many writers who choose to share their story as a fiction novel. If you are publishing it under your real name I would still recommend focusing on your story and still changing names and any identifying features or locations.
 5. Write it under a pen name.
 - Publishing your book under a pen name is another option but has pros and cons. Ask your questions about pen names in this post in our private group [here](#).
 6. Write it in third person.
 - You can say something like this, “I read (or heard) a story once about...and this is how they overcame it.”

Include Disclaimers

I also recommend that you include a disclaimer on your copyright page.

For example, you can include one or more of these disclaimers:

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

I have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed the names of individuals and places, I may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

Additional resources:

- Here is more information: <https://helensedwick.com/book-disclaimers-dont-have-to-be-boring>