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Introduction to Memoirs, delivered on August 24, 2016

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My profession, college and university president, required letter writing and delivering speeches. In the early years, I spoke mostly from an outline, writing out only a few complete manuscripts. Not too many years into my tenure as president of Grand Valley State University, I began writing my speeches. I did so because I did not want to speak too long. I wanted to have a strong ending that eludes so many as they search about for a conclusion, and I sought to give my expression an acceptable level of literary quality. With the exception of a few articles, that is the extent of my writing. That production called upon all of my self-discipline, so when I consider writing a memoir, I am not sure I should or want to make the effort.

Several of my friends urged me to write my memoirs. I am complimented they think what I have to report is worth a memoir, yet to suggest such a project may be just a pleasantry, such as “you don’t look your age.” Since the effort of writing my life story is daunting, I asked the questions “who writes memoirs and why?” I needed a satisfactory answer before I could undertake the task. Noted persons who obviously shape their times do to explain events as they understand them and for the money their celebrity commands. Some less known write about their lives and provide chronicles of everyday life. Many want to leave their record for future generations of family. The self-important also occasionally indulge themselves in memoir writing. I concluded that I would work on a memoir in an attempt to explain myself to me. Human life as a combination of singular experiences, thus each of us contributes just one set to the total. We are infinitesimal when compared to all, yet we are wrapped in only one combination of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, making them dominant and formative. Our egos are always with us, motivating what we do and who we are. A memoir makes one look at a single life and its effect. If writing one improves self-understanding, it may add to the poor of understanding. So I will try with diligence to tell my story. Let the story begin.