

Biographies Change Lives

"I've sat with kings and dined with poets, eavesdropped on history's most significant conversations and danced with ideas that forever changed me – all because I picked up a book." – Andy Andrews

Just who is Andy Andrews and what does he mean to you? Andy Andrews lived a relatively normal life until the age of nineteen, when both his parents died – his mother from cancer, his father in an automobile accident. Because of his unwise choices, within a span of several years, he found himself homeless. Long story short – someone sent him to a library where he read more than 200 biographies of great men and women. He learned about the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Andrew Carnegie among others. From reading these, he determined that there were specific characteristics each person had in common. Andy Andrews wrote a book The Traveler's Gift: Seven Decisions that Determine Personal Success based on what he learned. Twenty-plus years later, he's made a PBS Special based on this book, written several other books and become a well known speaker.

The Bartholomew County Public Library has several of his books in our Audio Collection and his newest book The Noticer: Sometimes All a Person Needs is a Little Perspective is coming soon.

Andy Andrews' story brings me to the point of this article: biographies. Our library has a fascinating collection of biographies. A biography is a description of someone's life, highlighting various aspects of his or her life, including intimate details of experiences, and may include an analysis of the subject's personality. Our collection is an accumulation of hundreds of lives and personalities, obscure and some not so obscure. Artists, architects, adventurers, movie stars, sports figures, politicians, inventors, presidents, kings and queens; the list is endless. In a random sampling of our collection I found books about all forty-four of our Presidents (104 books currently checked in just about Abraham Lincoln), Kit Carson, Ty Cobb, Elvis Presley, Jimmy Hoffa, Adolph Hitler, Princess Diana and John Winthrop (one of the earliest, but least known founders of America). But there's more! So much more and so much we can learn about life by reading them. How did they become the people they were? Were they simply born this way? Or were there decisions made at critical junctures in their lives that led to such success? And not everyone is a success – why not?

History is made from the stories of people's lives. In some manner, be it small or large, we all contribute to the world's history. We all have a story to tell. The library has several books that will assist you in putting your life story down on paper. They ask the pertinent questions – you fill in the blanks. Books like The Story of Your Life: Writing a

Spiritual Biography by Dan Wakefield help you answer questions like “Who am I? Why am I here? And what is the meaning of my life? Write the Story of Your Life by Ruth Kanin shows you that your life is a story and explains how to write it based on the premise that everyone’s life is unique, interesting and important; that your life matters socially and historically. But not everyone wants to write a book. Scrapbooking is another method of creating or crafting your story. The Book of Me by Angie Pederson takes scrapbooking to the next level, helping you learn about the various roles in your life, ways to write about them and ideas to illustrate them with photos, memorabilia and quotes.

Biographies can not only teach history, but they can (if you let them) change your life. But don’t take my word for it. Visit the Bartholomew County Public Library and check out our biography section. Try one – it could be the best thing you’ve ever done for yourself. Just ask Andy Andrews.

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