

Stories and Your Family Legacy

By Nanette Fimian Randall

Many of us have warm memories of the family tales we heard in our younger years. When we stop for a few minutes, we might even be able to envision ourselves listening to them. They were spun by special loved ones, usually an elder, at dinner tables, in kitchens and in cars. They were shared at a time when togetherness and family was different than it is today. Sometimes, when we heard the stories, we rolled our eyes and blew out our breath. Maybe we were just a tad impatient. We never imagined we might need or want to remember them someday.

Ah, the naiveté of youth...

Didn't we think we'd hear those voices, see those faces and remember those scents forever? The stories and the loved ones who told them were clearly etched in our minds. But before you know it, 20, 30 or 50 years pass, and in ever-so-quiet ways, we can't see, hear or remember the details of who said what. The voices of loved ones, once vibrant and alive, have grown silent because of disease, illness or death. Time steals the memory and the clarity. Technology can't even fix the fact that unrecorded stories are buried stories.

If we think of our lives as an open treasure chest, that may help with perspective. The stories we remember and share are jewels. But, when we forget or neglect to document good times, often we lose the memories, too.

When that happens, we lose our family's legacy.

And when just one person takes a step to preserve the stories, the course of history is forever changed. Anyone can do it. All you have to do is make a plan to start the process. Here are 10 simple ideas to think about.

1. Sign up for a writing class. Get ready to think about the past and write!
2. Get the family together. Ask them to help you remember important events. Tape record your time together or have everyone write down what they remember.
3. Put yourself in a quiet place and think about old stories passed down. Jot down thoughts.
4. Locate old photographs and see if you can remember some of the faces, places and stories. Write down what you remember.
5. Look at memorabilia in old scrapbooks. Think about the details of what you see.
6. Find old letters. Remember what you can about what was going on in the world when you received or wrote the letter.
7. Jot down some of the things you recall about your life. You can fill in the details later.
8. Think about some of the important who influenced you. Think about what was special or memorable about them. Write it down. Fill in the details later.
9. If genealogy interests you, check out www.familysearch.org.
10. Remember, if you have desire but lack the time or resources to do this important work yourself, hire a personal historian to help you. When you seek an expert to help you, you

can be assured that it will get done! An expert will interview, record, transcribe, organize, write, edit, and print legacy books for you. Expect to devote a few hours or longer working together.

Like every life, each person's spin on life is uniquely different and wonderful. Life memoirs give families insight about how our loved ones overcame hardship and loss, or the ways they persevered and found joy. Stories tell others about the ways that challenged, graced and helped them develop strength and courage. Stories speak to humanity.

Capturing an individual's story is akin to leaving an inheritance ahead of time. If you view documented stories as precious as a family heirloom, it's not surprising that you will feel a sense of peace and gratitude once the story treasures have been captured.

Nanette Fimian Randall, the owner of Memoirs by Design, is an experienced personal historian and a DMAR Affiliate. She began capturing oral histories and life stories in 2006. Nanette self-publishes individual, family and business legacy books, and provides assistance to others in all phases of storytelling. Contact her at 303-885-3790 or through www.memoirsbydesign.com. Email is Nanette@memoirsbydesign.com.

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