

Writing or Telling Your Life

Your children, and their children, will understand their own heritage better if they understand more about your personal history. People tend to not realize how little their own children know about their lives, and to underestimate the importance of their personal stories. One of the greatest gifts you can give your family is to tell them the stories of your life. Everyone is born a storyteller!

You can write these stories, record them on audiotape, or record them on videotape. You do not need to have a terminal illness to do this; in fact, the stories work better if you record them while you are healthy and young. You can add to them as you get older and remember or experience new stories.

If you write your story, take as long as you need and go into as much depth as you choose. You can hand-write your story, or type it; it doesn't matter how you do it, as long as you **do it!** If you audiotape your story, this could take anywhere from one hour to an entire day. Make sure you are using a good recorder, preferably digital. Particularly important is a good microphone. Speak clearly and confidently, so whoever listens to it can picture you sitting in front of them. If you videotape your story, make sure you have adequate tapes and that the machine is working before you start. You probably don't want to have to do this more than once.

Content

Here are some topics you might want to cover. Feel free to add your own topics. Everyone's life is different, but here are some ideas to get you started.

1. *Who were your parents and grandparents?* What were their names, when were they born, did they have brothers and sisters, where were they from, how did they meet, when did they marry? Virtually anything you know about your parents, grandparents, and on back will be very interesting to your children or future generations. They probably don't know this information, even though you may have told them, they won't remember it the way you do, and they will value your information greatly some day, even if not now.

2. *When and where were you born?* What were the circumstances of your conception and birth, that you have been told? Anything particularly interesting there? What about your brothers and sisters? When were they born, what were their full names, and what was interesting about their birth? Tell stories. You don't have to be perfect, because your children will want to know about you, and whatever you say will tell them about you.

3. *Tell some stories about your growing up days.* Things are different now, so future generations will be happy to know about how things were "back then." Tell about

awards you won, sports you played, your favorite games or toys, how you did in school, whatever stands out.

4. *How far did you go in school?* What were the circumstances? Where did you go to school? What do you remember about graduation? What stood out most for you in school?

5. *Tell how you experienced days that were historical.* Such as: Pearl Harbor Day if you were alive, the stock market crash in 1929, VE and VJ days, when the atomic bombs were dropped, when Kennedy was assassinated, when men walked on the moon, when Martin Luther King was killed, and whatever days stand out in your mind. Where were you, what were you doing, how did you feel?

6. *How did you meet the other parent of your children?* Children are always interested in that story. Even if the relationship didn't work out later, children will want to hear about what attracted you to their other parent and your early courtship days. When and where were you married? What were the circumstances?

7. *Tell about how you became interested in the work you do, and other kinds jobs you have had.* What do you like about your work? What is rewarding to you? What would you have liked to do if you didn't choose that work?

8. *How was it that your children came to be born?* Tell these stories about all of your children, one at a time. How did you feel when they were conceived, born? What were the circumstances of their births? This part will be especially important to your children and their children later. Tell some stories about their growing up, but remember, this is your life. They have their own stories, so tell your perspective.

9. *What were the challenges in your life?* Losses, deaths, health challenges, things that didn't go as planned. How did you deal with these things? What did you learn from them?

10. *Tell any family stories that come to mind.* How has aging been for you? What do you wish for future generations?

How to Start

Some hints to making an interesting experience for listeners:

If you are taping it, you can do it alone or with your children or someone else present. Sometimes it is easier to tell if you have an audience. But they are not to speak, except to ask a few questions. This is your story, to tell as you want. You don't have to be perfect, just be yourself.

You can choose how much detail to go into. You don't have to tell everything you know, but just the highlights, if you tend to be longwinded. If you tend to

summarize, be sure to give more details than you might normally. You also don't have to go into the family's laundry unless you want to. This is sort of the "family on display," stories that will be passed down for generations. Only tell what you want to tell. Be honest with what you tell, but you don't have to go into everything if you don't want to.

You can add pictures and other mementoes into a scrapbook of your life to go along with the oral or written history. You know who is in those old pictures, but that doesn't mean your children will, and they will appreciate your indicating who various people are.

If You Need Help

Some people want to do this process on their own or with the help of their families or friends, while others would like to be led through it by a professional interviewer. I can offer consultation with you or your family, or I can come to your home and do the interview, and arrange to have it taped on audio or video.

Alternately, I can also help you by ghostwriting your experiences or editing your own writing and preparing it in a format of your choice.

I have 30 years experience interviewing people, and can assist you in making this oral or written history a fun experience both for you and your family. Your stories will become a part of your family archives for generations to enjoy.

Please **contact me** for availability and rates.