

## **Securing Your Legacy: Leaving an everlasting memory for your family**

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Every family has its own special stories that are worthy of preservation. Unfortunately, these stories are often handed down orally, and eventually, they are either twisted beyond recognition or just lost. To keep that from happening in your family, why don't you be the one to commit the family stories to paper?

### **What should I write about?**

You are in a unique position to share memories of another time and place with the younger members of your family.

You have seen amazing changes in life and society.  
Some of you may even remember your family's immigrant generation.

All of you remember things that are fading quickly out of the popular culture:

- Black and white television
- video tape recorders
- vinyl records (78's and 45's)
- dial up modem
- polaroid instant cameras
- Toys and games that did not run on batteries
- typewriters (especially manual)

The current generation has no memory of things such as

- Koren War, Vietnam War and Gulf War
- Chuck Berry, Lawrence Welk, Buddy Holly, and . . .
- American Bandstand, the Twist, Spin the Bottle and . . .
- John Wayne, Cary Grand, Judy Garland, except for The Wizard of Oz reruns.

What does your family know of *your* early life? What more could you tell them about . . .

Your childhood	Your neighborhood(s)	Your relatives
Your family celebrations	Your summers	Your pets
Your hobbies	Your education	Your job/career history
Your military history	Your travels	Your spouse and how you met
Your marriage in its beginning years		Your struggles to be successful

It's never too late to start writing things down. If you don't, these memories and family ties may be gone forever.

## Getting Started

Don't overwhelm yourself to begin with. Start with a memory and expand it. For instance, think about your childhood. Now, write down six general memories, one next to each number:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

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2) \_\_\_\_\_

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3) \_\_\_\_\_

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4) \_\_\_\_\_

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5) \_\_\_\_\_

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6) \_\_\_\_\_

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Now, for each one, think of two specific details and insert them in the lines that follow each number.

Each of those memories and their details is the beginning of a story, just waiting for you to write it. You can not use the excuse that "I can't write." You just started your story.

## A Caveat . . . Be careful!

As long as you are writing about yourself, you hold the key to the truth. However, in all families, there are stories that are passed down that need careful checking.

Watch out for the myths and don't perpetuate them:

Our family's name was changed at Ellis Island. (**NO! No matter how many times you hear this, it is NEVER true. No one's name was ever changed at Ellis Island, at least not officially.**)

\_\_\_\_\_ had no siblings. (How do you know that?)

\_\_\_\_\_ was never married more than once; never moved to another state. (How do you know that?)

\_\_\_\_\_ witnessed \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ was born on \_\_\_\_\_;

\_\_\_\_\_ invented/discovered/proved \_\_\_\_\_; etc. (Where's the proof?)

Do you have valuable documents in your family? Are there . . .

Passports or ticket stubs?	Naturalization/citizenship papers?	Military papers?
Birth and death certificates?	Marriage certificates?	Newspaper articles?
Letters, Bibles, journals?	Photographs	Yearbooks?

Are they folded up in drawers or protected in acid-free sheet protectors in albums?

Have you looked at the information on them or made copies so others can see them too?

The way you prove your family stories is through **documentation**.

### How do I go about actually writing a story?

Steps to take to preserve your family stories:

Outline the story you want to write so you don't forget any of the details before you begin.

Get your names, dates, locations, and facts straightened out before you begin to type. You may need to do a bit of research at this point. Think about calling on a member of the local genealogical society or a librarian if you need direction.

Use a computer and a basic word processing program, such as Microsoft Word or Pages for Macs. If you don't know how to do it yourself, find someone who can do it for you and either dictate to the person or write a draft by hand that can then be typed.

Once your story has been typed, go over it carefully for accuracy. Make any corrections that you can and then hand it over to someone else for careful proofreading.

Don't get insulted if someone tells you that corrections are needed. That's what the editing process is for!

If you are thinking of publishing your memoirs or collecting a group of family stories in book form, make sure you are consistent in your style decisions.

Your stories will be enhanced by the addition of photos. These should be in digital format so they can be added to your writing on the computer. You may need assistance with scanning and editing your photos for publication, but there are many places to get that help.

The more you follow the genealogical process, the more your descendants will thank you.  
Mention each person's complete name, not just a nickname.  
Use maiden names for women so their families can be located.  
When possible, give a time period and location for each person.  
If you are pulling information from somewhere other than your memory, indicate what the source of your information is.  
Use European/genealogical dating to avoid confusion. That means day first, then month, then year: 4 July 2019 or 4 Jul 2019 but NEVER 7/4/19.  
Don't abbreviate! Does CA mean California or Canada?  
Don't "borrow" **ANYTHING** from the Internet if you are going to publish. Anything published online, including photos, may be copyright-protected.

If you need to see some examples of 500-word biographies, you can check out the St. Louis Genealogical Society's City/County Biographies project at <https://stlgs.org/research-2/community/st-louis-biographies>.

And while you are looking at the biographies, think about submitting a biography of one of your St. Louis ancestors.

## Resources

Here are some books that will offer you general guidelines:

Carmack, Sharon Bartolo. *You Can Write Your Family History*. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2009).

Elizabeth Shown Mills, CG, CGL, FASG, FNGS, *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian*, Published by Genealogical Publishing Co., 1997, 124 pages, hardcover.

Hatcher, Patricia Law *Producing a Quality Family History*. (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, Inc., 1996). Out of print, but worth having, if you can find a used copy or obtain one from a library

Morton, Sunny Jane. *Story of My Life*. (Dublin, New Hampshire: Family Tree Books, 2016).