The Write Stuff
Leaving a Recorded Legacy; Personal Histories, Journals, Diaries and Letters

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Why Write

Family historians often search for years, looking for a few clues in old records - hoping to find more than just the names, dates and places of their ancestors.

Someday, we will be someone’s ancestor. Leaving behind a mindful, careful record of our lives requires planning and some effort.

Our posterity will most likely be swimming in the overabundance of information that our online presence will leave behind, which is a poor reflection of who you actually are.

What will your life’s legacy be? What stories, events and wisdom will you share with the next generation?

Don’t be forgotten. Leave something behind to be cherished and remembered.

“What could you do better for your children and your children’s children than to record the story of your life, your triumphs over adversity, your recovery after a fall, your progress when all seemed black, your rejoicing when you finally achieved?”

~Spencer W. Kimball

High Tech, Low Tech or Both?

There are so many options available to record your life. Journaling apps digitally saves your thoughts. Blogging a journal and printing it into a hardcover book is another option.

You can write with a special pen that will not only record your voice, but will record what you write with it, then upload it to a computer or to the cloud.

You can also dictate your thoughts and have an app transcribe your words onto a page without even touching a keyboard.

Some people will always prefer the touch and feel of paper. While they may be reluctant to use technology to write their thoughts, they can embrace the technology that will help them preserve those thoughts for future generations.

Scanning apps make your handwritten pages not only be digitized - thus shareable, but also made searchable.

While a journal can only exist physically in one place - a digitized copy allows many to inherit its contents.

“Why Write

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“People often use the excuse that their lives are uneventful and nobody would be interested in what they have done. But I promise you, that if you will keep your journals and records, they will indeed be a source of great inspiration to your families, to your children, your grandchildren, and others, on through the generations. … Each of us is important to those who are near and dear to us — and as our posterity read of our life’s experiences, they, too, will come to know and love us.”

~Spencer W. Kimball

“A life that is not documented is a life that within a generation or two will largely be lost to memory. What a tragedy this can be in the history of a family. Knowledge of our ancestors shapes us and instills within us values that give direction and meaning to our lives.”

~Dennis B. Neuenschwander

“When writing the Story of your life, Don’t let anyone Else hold the pen.”
~anonymous

“Today’s memories and stories become tomorrow’s Family History.”
~Valerie Elkins

Personal Histories, Memoirs & Stories

Writing your life’s stories can be very overwhelming. How do you cover a lifetime of love, loss, success, defeat, triumph and tragedy on the page, paper or electronic?

Begin small. Make a list of your top 10 stories – the ones you want to be sure are never forgotten.

Start by writing one chapter; a stand-alone story that if nothing else is recorded, you will have some peace knowing that one is preserved.

Chapter by chapter, your life’s story will emerge. Consider printing each chapter as a book as you go along. Putting it off until you are all finished often means it will never get done. Self-publishing offers affordable options.

Journals and Diaries

TECH: Options like adding the weather and maps into entries and the ease and versatility of journal writing on a keyboard are appealing. Today’s apps and online companies may disappear tomorrow, so take necessary precautions to preserve your record. Backup it up, keep digital copies in several places and print up a hard copy as well.

PAPER: Selecting just the right journal is half the fun for some. Choose a journal that is printed on acid-free paper. Black ink pens preserve writing the longest. Scan your pages and digitize your journal. Email a copy to yourself and upload to Evernote.com which has OCR capability and can make your writing searchable.

Letters

TECH:

Send a copy of emails to a cloud storage account like Evernote, Google Drive or Dropbox. Print a hard copy of important emails and letters saved in a file or notebook.

Take a screenshot of your texts, Instant Messages, etc. that you want to save. Save in the cloud and print.

PAPER:

Scan, digitize and save. Make copies of correspondence – letters to and from. Add notes of context and meaning behind letters content to ensure reader’s appreciation for the contents. Preserve and protect paper by using archival safe sleeves and store in a safe environment.

“History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.”
~ Winston Churchill

“Preserve Your Memories, Keep Them Well, What You Forget You Can Never Retell.”
~ Louisa May Alcott
The Write Resources

3. Wright, Randal A. The 3 Word Journal: Finding Your Purpose in Life, National Family Institute, Austin, Texas; www.3wordjournal.com
13. Create your own blog for free at blogger.com, wordpress.org, wix.com or weebley.com
15. Story Possibilities by Steffani Raff, professional storyteller with great resources and help in telling your stories better. <http://www.storypossibilities.com>

Join!
The Pachyderm Project
“Elephants Never Forget. Neither Should Families.”
“30 Days To Becoming Unforgettable Challenge”
www.ValerieElkins.com

Bonus Tips

- There is no right or wrong way to record your story – just begin it. Now.
- Don’t forget to add context to your writing. The backstory of events may seem self-evident today, but a mystery tomorrow. Adding relevance to why those particular details mean something to you will increase the understanding and appreciation for your circumstance in the generations ahead.
- Consider audio or video taping (vlog) your personal history. Tech like Dragon NaturallySpeaking and viemo.com are options to consider.
- Create a blog! Write about your memories, stories and journal of events. You can make the blog as public or as private as you want. Publish the posts once a year into a hardbound book.
- Choose a comfortable place and regular schedule to write. Make it a habit.
- Don’t leave your photos on your phone! Create a scrapbook page using those photos, add journal cards and forward to an online printer quickly using apps like Project Life. Documenting your life as you go will make it quick and easy.
- Think about what you wish you knew about your ancestors: what did they eat for breakfasts, what made them laugh, etc., now answer those questions yourself.