

Discovering and Preserving Your Life Story

When I was a child, my mother and I would take a train every summer from Boston to Vermont to spend August with my grandparents on their farm. Today the grandparents are gone, but I still recall these special memories of my childhood summers when I smell fresh cut hay or walk into a horse barn.

This year, as I turned 60, I found myself thinking about my grandparents and what I knew about them and their history. It turns out that I don't know that much. I can't answer questions like when they came to the United States, where they were born, or who were their parents. And my mother, the one resource I have left to answer those questions, is 94 and her memories have faded.

I decided to capture our family history as best as I can for my siblings, daughter and their children. Fortunately, our generation can harness the power of the Internet to uncover data clues about past family members. We also have computing resources, journaling software, digital photos, video clips and the ability to scan images to help create a rich and valuable historical archive.

When I took the first step of gathering photos, letters, and other memorabilia, I had thought about scrap booking this history. That would be fun and appealed to my artistic side, but in the end I would only have one book to share with many. I decided to explore what was available using electronic and Internet media.

I found that our personal computers can be used to create an electronic archive that can reproduce as many copies as I may need to share with family members. And, if anyone wants to add to the archive or use some of the data for their own stories, it's easy to edit and share. In the end I can give everyone a CD ROM along with a printed book they are sure to cherish.

There are several good resources on the web that helped me get started. LifeBio.com™ has a family history gathering web service. Their free trial will let you test the service to see if it fits your needs. LifeBio also has a Memory Journal that you can purchase to give to a parent or grandparent who might not be computer savvy. In this journal they write answers to a series of questions, filling in the blanks about their memories in their own words. Later you transcribe their thoughts over to your own electronic archive. LifeBio can print the final edition of your historical work, including digital pictures and scanned images, into a hardcopy bound gift book.

My grandparents came to the U.S. from Europe. The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation was a helpful website to search for parents, grandparents and others in my family who came through Ellis Island. In the website's Genealogy section you can download a four-generation pedigree chart that serves as a great starting point for building your family tree.

Another good resource for researching family history is RootsWeb.com. They have links to over fifty websites that may provide clues or actual data about your ancestry. If your grandparents came from Asia or are Native American, many ethnic resources can be researched from links listed on their Genealogy Forum.

I decided to include medical health data in my family history. This would include medical conditions I know about myself, my parents and my grandparents. This data could be helpful to future generations of my family. My Family Health Portrait is a tool from the U.S. Surgeon General's office that allows you to create a personalized family tree charting my family's health history. The chart can be printed and shared with family members as well as healthcare professionals.

It takes time and effort to collect and record all the information that will create my life story, but I look forward to where this historical journey may take me.

Source and courtesy:

http://www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/howto/discovering_and_preserving_your_life_story.html