



Preserving FAMILY MEMORIES

“I urge you to pursue preserving your personal history to allow your children and grandchildren to know who you were as a child and what your hopes and dreams were.” —Oprah Winfrey



MY MOTHER PASSED AWAY in 1984—more than a decade before I realized how valuable her stories about her life would be to me, my children, and eventually my grandchildren. How I would love to hear about her parents and grandparents, life in Europe before and during World War II, her thoughts and feelings as a wife and mother, and her views on spirituality.

When my first son was born in 1995, I woke up to my oversight and asked my father to sit down in front of our camcorder and talk about his ancestors and his life. He told about living without a refrigerator or radio, about dirigibles flying overhead, and about his experiences during World War II as a navigator on a bomber flying over Europe.

Later, I flew to Europe to gather stories about my mother and her ancestors that her brother still could remember.

Now I feel grateful for the many hours of stories I collected, because my uncle has passed away and my father no longer has the stamina for long interviews.

Family stories can be captured using a camcorder, but a tape recorder can be less intimidating for the person being interviewed. My uncle felt uncomfortable with both methods, so I simply sat and listened during the day, and returned to the hotel at night to write down everything I could remember.

Try following these tips for gathering your family's stories:

Develop a list of questions to ask, and share them ahead of time with your interviewees. Use these questions as the tools to get the conversation flowing.

Start with memories of ancestors and move through the interviewee's childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, continuing into the present. Gather statements about such topics as the meaning of life, wisdom garnered from long experi-

ence, and hopes for future generations.

Transcribe the tapes or type up your notes.

The editing process involves placing everything in proper order, combining stories that belong together, and editing the text itself to make it interesting and smooth while retaining the individual's personality.

Share your edited version with the person you interviewed, and allow him or her to update, clarify and make corrections.

Scan photos and other memorabilia, such as letters and documents, to create images for use in the book.

Use a layout program, such as Publisher, Quark Xpress or InDesign, to place your images and text together on the pages.

Print finished pages on heavyweight paper that will not bleed through. The document can be saved on a flash drive and taken to a print shop for high-quality printouts.

Additionally, a bindery can turn printed pages into a single hardbound book or as many copies as you would like. You can even select the covers and materials to be used.

These books make a fabulous gift for family members that can be passed on as treasured heirlooms from one generation to the next.

*About the author: Heidi Bright Paraless, M.Div., is a local free-lance writer, editor and photographer who preserves family memories for others. www.preservefamilymemories.com. She also is the author of *Hidden Voices: Biblical Women and Our Christian Heritage* (Smyth & Helwys, 1998). She can be contacted at 513.774.9882*

