



## A Story Like No Other~Your Own

» Ever discover a dusty journal or diary your mom kept when you were a kid? Or talk your dad into telling tales of his childhood adventures? Maybe you've exchanged stories at a family reunion – and wish you'd recorded them for the kids to hear someday.

**Taking time to provide** a legacy – a personal record or family history – is a gift an increasing number of Baby Boomers and Millennials want to leave their children. Websites like Ancestry.com and accessible Mormon Church genealogy libraries along with cable shows like TLC's "Who Do You Think You Are?" and the PBS series, "Finding Your Roots" have only fanned the fire.

A family tree can be interesting. In fact Genealogy now ranks second only to gardening as American's favorite pastime. Fortune.com says Ancestry.com is valued at \$2.6 billion – up \$1 billion since 2012.

But it's the escapades, the struggles, and the colorful personalities that build a legacy. That's why handwritten accounts, old home movies, diaries and photos become family treasures. They depict Dad's life as a soldier in Vietnam – or your grandparents' experience as first-generation Americans. They explain how your mother was able to earn a teaching degree while raising three kids. As stories they teach us about motivation, passion and strength. Isn't that what you'd like your children to know about you someday?

The Association of Personal Histories was founded in 1975. Its members get instruction on how to capture personal information using tools such as written biographies, journals, records of milestones, electronic recordings, scrapbooks and personal memoirs. But as they admit, it often takes time – especially for younger folks – to understand why the past is important.

"As parents know, our children are not as fascinated by our fascinating lives as we are," explains William Zinsser in "How to Write a Memoir," noting that once parents have children of their own, however, the twinges of advancing age often kick in. "Suddenly we yearn to know more about our family heritage, our ancestors – their struggles and stories."



For Time Capsule Memoirs founder and local APH member Kirk Woundy, the work of recording and publishing the stories of real people is more than a job—it's a passion. The Syracuse University graduate spent most of his 15-plus-year career as a newspaper editor, but found himself at a crossroads last year. He excelled at meeting deadlines and delivering crisp, readable stories. But something was missing.

In 2014 he started volunteering with Pikes Peak Hospice, where he paid weekly visits to a client in a long-term care facility. The frail man—estranged from most of his family for years—told fascinating, powerful stories of his life, including those of his military experiences in Vietnam. Woundy soon realized that some of the man's family members might never have heard these accounts. "The dynamics of a family of course can be really complicated," he says. "But I began to wonder, 'If they'd known, would things have been different?'"

Today as a writer and researcher, he conducts in-depth interviews with individuals and families, shapes them into narratives, and collects photos that will help tell a story. Some are full-length life accounts; others are shorter, commemorative "slice of life" books.

Personal historians like Woundy are often sought to cover special occasions such as weddings and anniversaries, military unit get-togethers and family reunions. Colorado Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau Group Services Manager Jennifer Dellinger says she fields dozens of inquiries each year. "We are frequently approached by veterans' groups to recommend someone to write and publish their stories," she says.

So next time the family gathers around the campfire – or waxes nostalgic at an anniversary party, you might want to seize the moment ... before it's too late. 📷



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