

My Family: I Could Write a Book

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Many of us have been pursuing genealogical research for twenty or thirty years - or more. When I started writing articles about the people I had been researching, it became apparent how much I didn't know about them, even after all that time and effort. Writing about these people became a valuable tool; one I consider at least as important, if not more so, than my search for documents and vital records.

Some of us are getting older and are beginning to question what will happen to our work when we pass away. Is anyone interested? Who will want it? Should I donate it to some institution or try to find someone within my own family who will care about it.

**It's not what you know,
or how much you know,
but what you do with it that's important.**

This talk was created to illustrate possible answers to these questions; answers that may seem surprising.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

What do you know- start by writing a few sentences about the birth of one relative, someone you know (or knew) – like your grandmother or grandfather or a parent.

- Where were they born? In a town, village, city? In what country?
- What was it like in the area where they were born?
- What was going on politically or socially at that time? Was there a war? Pogroms? Were they able to live in harmony with their neighbors? With the authorities?
- What was the family's economic status? What was the father's occupation? Did the mother work too?
- When was the birth? At home or in a hospital?
- Who delivered that person? A doctor or a midwife? Why?
- Who else was in the family?
- Were there pets?
- What was the address? Did they live in an apartment, tenement or house?
- Did other people or families live with them, relatives, boarders? Why?
- Do I have a photograph of: Any of these people from this time period? The house they lived in? The neighborhood? A map of the place they lived?
- What did they look like? What did they weigh? How long were they there? What color hair did they have? Did their eyes stay blue or change? Did they have any distinguishing birthmarks?

Why Bother?

- It will force you to think about what you are doing, really think about the person, and also why you are doing it.
- It will force you to get organized.
- It will show you what information is missing which is different from what you don't know.
- Setting the words on paper makes an enormous difference.
- Writing forces you to look carefully and to consider the context of the information.

Some good reasons to begin now!

- Even inexperienced writers can jot down a few words.
- You can write about anything in any order.
- It doesn't have to be perfect. You can write something, change it, rearrange it, add to it later, or even delete it in favor of something else you write.
- Start with something that interests you or something you think you know and see where that leads you.
- The end goal is not as important as the process.
- You don't have to share your work with others unless you want to – and you can decide that later.
- Whether you write to help you organize your material, or you write to share your information with your entire family, or some part of it, you will find that writing is a reward unto itself.
- It will enhance your genealogical research in ways that are totally unexpected.
- You will find that if you do decide to share what you have written, the amount of information that comes back to you as a result far exceeds the amount of time and effort you've put into the original piece.

You Only Need To Get Started

Internet Guides on How to Conduct an Oral History Interview

Google Oral Histories

- www.folklife.si.edu Search for Oral History Guide
- www.dohistory.org Click on On Your Own Toolkit

Sources for Information about People Beyond Ancestry.com

- Social Media like Facebook and Twitter
- Newspapers: <http://chronicalingamerica.loc.gov/>
- Newspapers: <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>
- Newspapers: newspapers.com
- Newspapers: <http://www.freewspaperarchives.us>
- ProQuest: Can generally be found at public libraries who make it available to patrons of their system at no charge
- Local libraries and historical societies in the communities in which the people lived are an excellent source of information. Reference librarians are often excited about a new project and eager to help if you call them and ask for information. Google ... historical society or ... public library

- Religious institutions such as local synagogues
- American Jewish Archives, www.americanjewisharchives.org
- American Jewish Historical Society www.ajhs.org
- YIVO (Eastern European Jewish History) www.yivo.org
- Leo Baeck Institute (German Jewish history) www.lbi.org
- Images: A surprising number of images of people you know can be found on Google on their Images front page. Even if your family member is not famous, it is worth a look to see if his/her image is available.

Print on Demand Publishers

These publishers work with the author to help develop a professional looking product at low cost. Both hard and soft cover books, color and black and white, can be ordered in very small quantities, even one copy, with re-orders available “on demand.” eBooks are also available from many of these publishers.

- www.lightningsource.com (Very good customer service)
- www.lulu.com
- www.blurb.com (a little more expensive and not as flexible about page size and formatting)
- www.amazon.com and www.Kindle.com for eBooks.
- Kinkos – in stores – have the equipment to print black and white or color books from your manuscript including the binding of your choice

Create a Family Webpage (Free or Very Low Cost)

- www.weebly.com
- www.websitebuildertop10.com/best-free-webpage-builders
- www.yola.com