



Cincinnati Senior Connection Foundation

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Why Should I Tell My Stories?

An old African proverb says it best: **When an elder dies, a library burns to the ground. Most of us recognize this, and yet our elders sometimes demur modestly when we ask them to share their stories as a legacy for future generations. Here are some tips on convincing them.**

Why Your Story is Important:

- **It's what makes us human.** We all have a sense of how far back in human history storytelling goes. It is an ancient tradition, as old as language itself that fulfills a basic human need to cast our experiences in narrative form and pass them down.
- **Each of our lives is a little piece of history.** The Cincinnati Historical Society collects the photographs of everyday people, and archives them. On a recent visit there, we were told that they have plenty of photos of historic events, such as the 1937 flood. Interestingly, what they were missing was pictures from everyday life in the 1960's and 70's, and beyond. They assume people are throwing these away, or still storing them in their basement, but they consider these to be history.
- **You carry with you the stories of others.** In addition to your own stories, you are likely in possession of other people's stories, people who are no longer with us. In the course of three, or maybe four generations, the living memory of most people has vanished. How many people who knew your grandmother are still alive? What stories could you tell about her?
- **Telling your stories is a way to connect the generations,** connect your grandparents, through you, to your grandchildren, and beyond. The need for connection to something larger than oneself is a basic human need. As we get older we all sense this intuitively, and feel an increasing, almost imperative need to connect across time with the generations.
- **It can benefit the storyteller.** Although it used to be considered cause for concern, studies have shown that the process of life review is a natural and even beneficial part of growing older.
 - Reminiscence can increase your sense of psychological and emotional well-being and give you a sense of perspective on your life.
 - If reminiscences are captured in enduring form, they address a universal need to be remembered and to feel your life has made a difference.
 - Reviewing your life can help you come to terms with issues or conflicts in your life, and with your own mortality, and in the end can provide a deep sense of satisfaction.

Overcoming Objections

Let's take a look at a few of the obstacles we hear in our day to day work, and some ways you might counter those objections:

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- **No one cares** - we hear this often from older people. Their children and grandchildren are busy, and the elders are convinced they don't care.
 - This is objectively not true in most cases. Children and grandchildren are asking, sometimes begging for you to leave your stories.
 - In a few cases, this may be true, RIGHT NOW. But our experience has shown that someday, someone will. If not the generations alive today, those generations to come. Wouldn't you love to have something written or passed down from your great grandparents about their daily life, their thoughts and feelings, hopes and dreams?
- **My life is boring** - While it can be refreshing to hear members of The Greatest Generation talk about how their life was nothing special, how they only did what everyone else did, of course, their lives, and your life, is not boring. Your individual, personal perspective on the massive changes in the world that have occurred during your lifetime are important, and interesting, and only you can tell that story. We can read about that time period in history books, but a personal reflection is so much more meaningful.
- **I'm not an important person** - maybe so, but everyone is important to someone, and everybody's story is important
- **I can't write** - People read good autobiographies, and great memoir, and think they have to live up to that level of writing. Well, that's just silly. You don't. All you have to do is write in your own voice, your own words. Or, don't write at all. Everyone can tell a story. Maybe some are better than others at this, but in the end, what matters is getting your stories out, in your own words. Point is, there's a way to tell your stories, even if you think you can't write. Or if you don't want to.
- **I have plenty of time left** - Of course, we all know in our rational minds that we are not promised tomorrow. None of us knows how much time we have left, and we have learned the hard way that once you are sick is not the time to write your story.
- **It's an overwhelming project/I don't know where to start** - Yes, it can be. But hiring a professional is a way to make it less daunting. In any case is the daunting nature of an important task a good reason for not doing it?
- **It's hard to think about a future that doesn't include me** - This is often the unstated undercurrent of the objections, which should be recognized and respected by relatives of the elder. On some level, creating a personal history, telling your life stories, is on par with writing a will and planning your own funeral. It takes a certain amount of willingness to look your mortality straight in the face and say, I am not afraid of you, or, if I am, at least I am not going to allow that fear to keep me from doing what I know is right, as a gift for those who I will leave behind.

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