

Take the Time to Record Your History

By Ryan Helfenbein

Each year I participate in our local middle school's career day. This year, an eighth grader asked if my job has an emotional effect on me. I told her that, yes, there are situations that become extremely emotional, but then surprised her by telling her just how rewarding my job could be when a family truly embraced the story of their loved one's life. If an 80-year-old dies, the funeral industry has had a tendency to focus on the death of that person, where I try to focus on the countless people who were touched by the journey of this person.

Any funeral director can hand a family a standard photocopied document to fill in the blanks and make a notice for the newspaper. But for years, we've advised our clients to write their own life histories, i.e., obituaries, well in advance. "Take the time now to record your history for future generations," my father would always say. This provides a much more memorable write-up than the standard boilerplate. When you take the time in advance to start this process, you are not only able to create a legacy that can be passed down for future generations, but a story of remembrance that all can share.

So how do you write one of these life histories? Actually, it is easier than one might imagine. First and foremost, don't think – just write. Write how you would tell your tale, add personality, uniqueness, funny stories and most importantly

adventures in your life with which family and friends can emotionally connect. Start with your childhood, telling stories about you growing up, where you were raised, what schools you attended and what accomplishments and even hurdles you had in your early childhood.

From there, you will want to cover your extended education, military service, marriage and family life. Include what you enjoyed doing with your children as they grew up, favorite trips taken as a family and with your spouse, and where you made your home together. Lastly, include your later years, right up to the present. All along the way, do not shorten any story, memory or life adventure. People enjoy reading things that they can picture. Create the picture of your life and share experiences with your friends and family.

One tip: Always be sure to include dates and places in your life history. People may not be able to connect to your high school, but can connect to the fact that they may have graduated the same year as you. By doing this, people are better able to follow your life and connect the dates, allowing future

generations to more clearly understand your family's story.

This Summer while relaxing at the beach or pool, go ahead and grab your drink of choice, two note pads and enjoy some time recording your life history. Writing it today will help ensure that your service will be a true reflection of your life, and not solely an observance of your death.

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Recording your life history allows future generations to more clearly understand your family's history

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