

Highlands Gal

Don't Wait Until It's Too Late!

By Pattie Whitehouse

*If you could ask one question of your grandmother,
what would it be?*

*What do you think your grandchildren will want to know
about your mother? Or you?*



A personal history is an individual's life story, shared with family and friends. It may be a person's most important legacy.

The New Year is a good time to begin your own personal history, or to encourage someone in your life to begin theirs. Here are some tips to help you get started.

Identify your purpose

Before you do anything else, decide who your audience is and think about what you want them to get out of your stories and memories.

Do you expect to share your personal history primarily with immediate family, or do you have a broader audience including friends in mind? Do you want your descendants to learn about where they came from? To know you in a deeper way than they do now? Would you like to pass on some of what you've learned in life, in the hope that it will help others?

Once you identify your purpose, it will be easier to plan how to go about achieving it.

Determine your focus

Do you want to review your whole life or just a part, such as your childhood? Will you concentrate on a particular aspect, perhaps education or career, or portray the diversity of your life experience?

The scope of your project will affect how you approach your preparation as well as the content you include.

Prepare your background material

This is optional! While some people find it helpful to organize information before beginning a project, for others, the prospect is so intimidating that they will put it off indefinitely — until it's too late.

If you are not the kind of person who revels in putting things in order, skip this step. If you are, doing some preparation will stimulate your memory and give you confidence as you begin your project. You can:

- Create a timeline, noting important dates in your life and historical events that affected you.
- Make brief notes about experiences you want to include — just a few words to remind you when the time comes.
- Get out the photo albums, letters, diaries and scrapbooks. Going through them will bring stories to mind.

Begin it now!

This is the most important step. Whatever you preserve will have value — but nothing will be recorded unless you make the effort.

Help is available. Find books about writing memoir in the library, take a life-writing class or join an autobiography group. You will find good information on the Association of Personal Historians website (www.personalhistorians.org). And don't forget your friendly neighbourhood personal historian!

What are you waiting for?

Pattie Whitehouse, a personal historian since 1992, helps people save their life stories in books and audio recordings so their grandchildren will understand the personal impact of historical events.

Contact Pattie at 250-478-3319 or pattie@pacificcoast.net

