



If You're a Senior, Your "Ordinary" Life Is Unusual Today

Even if you didn't stow away on a steamship in the 1920s at age 13, your personal history can be fascinating to your family, friends and others.

If you were born in the early part of America's 20th century, you experienced powerful events. Two world wars, a depression, new widespread use of the automobile, development of the movie industry, the growth of "labor-saving" devices and much more affected lives in small and large ways.

What you have to relate about the everyday effects of these events is interesting -- because it is about you (told to people who care about you), and because it provides details, emotions and insights that bring past events to life in wonderful and meaningful ways.

Many of the most interesting personal histories are *verbal* – simply telling stories.

Think about it: we have seen movie westerns. But what a difference it is to hear about one of the last real cattle drives in the late 1890s from an elderly gentleman who "rode drag" -- as he describes the dust and soreness, the dangers, boredom and beauty from Texas to Kansas City.

All it takes to create your personal history is a tape recorder and a remembering spirit, to share what life was like for you 50, 60 or more years ago; told when the mood strikes, perhaps with a loved one nearby to ask questions and prompt your recollections.

You might pick a time of year, like Christmases or Hanukkahs you remember celebrating as a child. Or a theme -- the pets you enjoyed, your first attempts at cooking or your first job. Perhaps you recall significant news headlines, and can describe what was happening in your life at the time and how the events affected you. How did you feel? Was it warm or cool? What

did you see and touch and smell? What did your surroundings look like? Tell as many details as possible, so your listeners can see the pictures you are painting with your words.

At some later date, your stories might even be transcribed and collected, to share or document or teach. The most important thing is that your voice, spirit and legacy of living will have a way of being heard by your grandchildren, nephews, nieces and others for generations to come.

The story of the young stowaway at the beginning of this article actually happened. He hid under a lifeboat on a cruise ship when it was in port in Los Angeles, and was discovered long out to sea. Upon arrival in Hawaii, as the vacationers disembarked, he was taken into custody and sentenced to work as a laborer on a pineapple plantation, until he had earned enough to pay for his trip – both ways. Once he had, he was promptly put back on another boat and taken home. Of course his mother was beside herself and made sure he paid in other ways at home, for a long time!

He told adventure when he was in his 80s, describing both a boy's desire to see the world and the desperation of the Depression Era, when such dreams seemed completely impossible. You may not have such a dramatic experience to recount, but many will treasure your description of ordinary life as it was years ago, because it is no longer "ordinary" today. Give it a try!

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