

HOW *to*
SAVE
YOUR
STUFF

Curating Your
Family History Assets

What are Life Story Assets and why should they be curated?



The majority of your most valuable assets earn little interest. In fact, at the time when these assets could be generating maximum profit, they are hidden away in drawers or closets, or worse yet, they just get thrown out, forgotten by those who could benefit most.

- What would your family be left with if you died today? Would it be boxes, piles of papers, and unorganized chaos?
- Are your closets, attics, basements, storerooms, and drawers stuffed with personal and family history items that you intend to get to someday?
- Are you weighed down by the sheer amount of paper—photos, scrapbooks, letters, documents, files you haven't looked at for years, memorabilia, recordings, trays of slides, old genealogy binders—some inherited from previous generations?
- Are you so overwhelmed by the volume and lack of organization of these assets that you put off doing anything with them?

It's a real source of stress for many people.



Getting rid of clutter is hard enough, but getting rid of personal or family history clutter is even tougher—because much of it is mysterious, and everything feels irreplaceable.

Then there are times when there is a pressing need for that special photo that you know you have *somewhere*...but finding it becomes a bewildering task.

We see so many people that are overwhelmed by the amount of family history “stuff” they have accumulated, and in many cases inherited. They look at the stack of boxes and feel stress and guilt. “I should do something with this.” Boxes upon boxes of moldy old photographs and oversized binders brimming with yellowed pedigree charts; it’s exhausting to contemplate. Which is the very reason they inherited it all in the first place—because the previous generation was too exhausted to deal with it. But it was too important to throw away.

The very nature of what’s in the boxes cripples our ability to pare it down in a sensible way.

If we have five wire whisks in the kitchen drawer, and we really only need one, we can dump the other four because we know that if we were mistaken, we can always drive on over to the dollar store or Williams-Sonoma for another whisk.



*overwhelmed mysterious when I retire
important ??? my day off
clutter someday will anyone care?*

But these mysterious Boxes are full of History. It's a heavy word, a weighty responsibility. The irreplaceable, inscrutable runes and heiroglyphics of the family knowledge have come into your possession. And you, by choice or by default, are the High Priest or Priestess, the keeper of the legacy. And that's a lot of pressure. Enough to make most people shut the door of the storage room and relieve their stress with some retail therapy, adding yet more stuff to the piles.

It becomes a painful spiral.

To the question "if your house were burning down, what would you grab?" The answer is always: those Boxes.

What if your life was put on display 100 years from now? What story would you like to have told? How would someone best tell your story? How would someone show what your life was really like? What could anyone learn from you? (What about your parents?) What artifacts and information would be available?



The truth is: your boxes or mountains of personal and family

history stuff are full of treasure. Someone *may* take the time to find the gems some day—most likely not. Unless you do something, those assets will remain buried until eventually it's just easier to throw them out.

Would you ignore a significant financial asset if you knew that it would be lost due to lack of attention?

You probably spend a lot of time organizing and managing your finances. You can identify and grasp the status of your money and financial assets. When we think of wealth, we often think of money—financial assets.

- Do you have a plan to pass your wealth on to future generations?
- Do you make investments with the future in mind?
- Are your assets generating compound interest?
- Do you insure things you value in case of loss?

Consider applying these questions to your life story assets.



Tom & Alison Taylor
Pictures and Stories, Inc.

Over the past ten years we have worked with hundreds of clients and taught thousands of people to organize their life story assets and preserve and share them in custom hardcover books, videos, and accessible digital archives.

We've read letters of correspondence between a mother and son at the Battle of the Bulge during WWII. We've seen pictures of Japan being rebuilt in the 1948; opened a can of 16mm film showing a newly married couple riding the trolleys in New York in 1931; unboxed audio recordings from a 1950 funeral; found a passport from a 1929 emigration to America; preserved the last picture taken of a beautiful teenage daughter before she tragically died. We've helped save countless other precious personal and family history assets. We LOVE what we do.

Some stories are epic, some pictures are hilarious, some accounts are gut-wrenching. The best stories are about regular people venturing through life, making the world better as they go. The key is to discover what may be important to future generations.

Curate

to select, organize, and present items in a collection

I have had the opportunity to work with museum curators. They go into the field, locate dinosaur bones, carefully excavate them and bring them to the museum. Then they reconstruct them, classify and name them, house and protect them for the future, while piecing together the story of their origins and existence. The museum staff presents them in interesting and meaningful exhibits for kids, other scientists, and dinosaur lovers of all sorts.

These curators have a passion for what they do. Take Mike Getty, pictured below. I have seen him patiently pick the debris off a newly discovered dinosaur bone in scorching 115 degree sun, then months later climb out of his tent in a snowstorm, walk barefoot in shorts and tee shirt through the fresh freezing mud to start the campfire. All the time he is smiling because he is going to recover a set of dinosaur bones.

You don't have to work in a museum to act as a curator of your own life story assets. You just have to have a passion to share meaningful things that will benefit the future.



Your life story assets will be much easier to discover, preserve, and share than this dinosaur bone (and likely more interesting to some).

Curation is like taking a lump of coal and turning it into a diamond. A little pressure, time, and some polishing—voilà, a diamond. It really won't take as much as you might think to process your dark dreaded boxes of life story assets into gems.



Same stuff, one is just curated.
Which would you rather have?

Which would your family rather have?

Life Story Assets

- photos, slides, film negatives (remember the old days when we had prints made?), digital photos
- scrapbooks, photo albums, framed pictures
- letters, documents, emails, certificates, school report cards, diplomas, newspaper clippings, travel documents, select receipts, military papers, speeches, lectures, articles, essays
- journals, diaries, genealogies, things you have already written, family newsletters, blogs, legal documents, professional papers, memoirs, reminiscences
- 8mm & 16 mm films, video tapes, and audio recordings
- various memorabilia or objects with sentimental value such as jewelry, military medals, childhood toys, artwork or school projects, antiques and furniture, awards, paintings, drawings
- list of people to talk with to get information and insights





*Wife's Birthday Jubilee
 Better Spring of
 Show brought of
 every household
 Chicago
 have just
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CONGRATULATIONS
 MEMBERS TRIM 1954

TALE PAGE
 COMPANY IN PORTLAND ME 15
 MISS JOYCE JOHNSON
 1015 HAVEN OF SALT LAKE CITY UTAH
 CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES FROM YOUR ORGANIZATION
 WITH THE SUCCESS OF YOURS IN YOUR NEW VACATION! BE PROUD
 OF YOUR LOVE TO ALL!
 CLIFTON JOHNSON



30-day Challenge

You will be amazed at what you can accomplish in 15 minutes a day. (The first day or two, give yourself a little extra time to get things set up.) Follow the steps outlined in the following pages, and track your results over 30 days below. Just note the number of minutes you spent and jot down a short comment on what you did.

	min	what task did I do today?
1	_____	_____
2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____
4	_____	_____
5	_____	_____
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12	_____	_____

min

what task did I do today?

13 _____

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30 _____

Step 1

Make a List. Gather Your Assets.

Start by using the Life Story Asset pages found later in this booklet, or use a separate sheet of paper and walk around your house listing everything that fits the category of personal or family history assets. You are taking an inventory, so list everything you see or can think of, important or not. No details yet, we are just trying to get the big picture—like: high school yearbooks, Mom’s genealogy boxes, family photo albums, Dad’s slides, kids’ school work boxes, Grandma’s Bible...that kind of thing.

You may start with a virtual tour by sitting down and listing everything you can think of before you start walking around the house and going through closets, the basement, or the file drawers in the den.

If it is possible, gather up all the materials and bring them to one place, like the dining room table or the spare bedroom. It can help to see it all at once. (Just be warned—this could be dangerous; you don’t want to create a new permanent home for these on your dining room table. Before gathering, be ready to commit to following these steps.)



One dull pencil is
better than
three sharp minds.

Step 2

Loosely categorize
and sort into piles.



Kind of like playing
solitaire (but a lot
more productive).
Make meaningful
piles.

Begin to make piles and sort into loose categories by time period, such as decades, or “childhood,” “youth,” “high school,” “college,” “marriage and family,” etc. You may have categories for each family member, but don’t get carried away by making categories too small or complicated. There is no right or wrong way. The idea is to loosely divide your assets, making them easier to find when the time comes.

As you sort through these items quickly, make good use of a trash bin for those items that are obviously garbage. Do you really need to save the travel brochures for the trip you thought about twenty years ago but didn’t take, or the decorating catalogs from when you remodeled the living room in 1995, or a flyer for the high school dance? If it clearly has no use, give it the toss.

Don’t get too caught up reading and reviewing things too closely at this point—save that for later. For now, just sort and sift. Pile, pile, pile. Toss, toss, toss.

Step 3

Attack one pile at a time.
Sift. Sort. Cull. Prioritize.

Find a receptacle(s) to place items in. Maybe a laundry basket or a box with hanging folders, one for each pile. When you place an item, move on to the next. This is not the time to read and ponder and reflect about each item, but if a special memory comes, make a quick note of it.

Pick a pile, any pile. Sometimes it makes sense to choose a smaller pile to get warmed up. Start with an easy one. The feeling of completing something feels good and will motivate you to tackle the next one.

Questions to ask yourself as you review each item:

- Will I or anyone else miss this if it is gone?
- Do I know what this is or what meaning it has? If not, does anyone else?
- What do I wish I had from earlier generations? Would anyone care about this in the future?
- Duplicates? Pick the best and pitch the rest.
- Is it large or bulky? Snap a photo of your kids' dog-eared fourth grade science project and let the rest go.
- Should the original be saved or is a digital version acceptable? Can it be replaced?
- Who will benefit from it? How?
- Would I want to include this in a book of my stories someday? If it helps tell the story of my life (or someone else's) or if it would be interesting to future generations, keep it for now.
- Is it available online? This may apply to old printed genealogical data, like pedigree charts your great-aunt Martha put together in the 60s. That data may be stored on your computer or in Family Search or Ancestry.

Another tip: take things out of frames and albums. This will decrease the footprint of your stuff dramatically. Framed certificates from awards you got in high school? (Are you ever going to hang them on a wall again?) Keep the certificate part and throw away the broken frame. Maybe throw the paper away after scanning it. (If it's a plaque that doesn't come apart, take a photograph of it.)

A world on containerizing: if you want to buy some fancy storage boxes, have at it. Or you can just use what you already have. You can put things by pile category into large plastic ziplock bags and put them in a plastic storage bin. You can also use binders and plastic sheet protectors, although they are bulky and take up more room. To each his own.

Use zip baggies for things that aren't precious. If you have valuable or fragile things, put them in archival-quality sleeves, envelopes or boxes. Acid-free photo storage boxes take up less room than large photo albums. Photo albums are great if they are archival and you use them regularly. But are yours readily accessible and used frequently? What if something happens to the one-of-a-kind album? Consider how they are used now and think about how they may be used in the future.

Your new boxes become reference material for your personal life story projects. As you continue to digitize things and put them into life story books, you can then feel free to discard the originals if you choose. (Make sure they are archived properly and backed up. More about that later.)

The selecting, sorting, thinning, and categorizing process will make what you save more valuable. These assets will increase in value with these next steps.

Organizing is what you do
before you do something,
so that when you do it,
it is not all mixed up.

A. A. Milne

Step 4

Assess what you have.

Review & refine.

Caption.

Take a look at the “piles” you have created. You have probably had to create some new piles and have collapsed a few piles into one. Browse through your assets in each pile to assess what you have. You may not have achieved perfection in the few hours you have spent organizing, but there is power in starting. You will find *your* best system as *you* do something.

Does the asset have emotional impact? Just because a photograph is beautiful doesn't mean it belongs in your memoir, if it has no meaning to you or to your readers. Conversely, just because a photo is in poor shape doesn't mean you shouldn't save it if it is meaningful to you.

Most often your first instincts are the best. If you don't know what an item is or recognize a reason to save it, chances are future generations won't care. That being said, if you choose to save something, it is wise to convey relevant information about that item. Who is in the picture, what is this document, why is this teacup special, how did Grandpa travel from Denmark to America after the war? You get the point.

Documents and artifacts can give us clues about our heritage. I can't tell you how many beautiful old photographs I have seen that no one has any idea of who the people are. If that information is not captured, it may be lost forever. Do you need more information about this asset? If you stumble across a photograph you think might be important, but you're not sure or need to ask someone about it, put it in a category marked “Questions” or “Items to Research.”

Label the asset. The best way to do this is to write lightly, in pencil, on the back side of the photo. (Don't use a pen or marker, which can bleed through or make an impression on the front side.) (You can also use a sticky note, but they do tend to detach too easily.) If the item is especially fragile, you may want to put it in an envelope and write the information on the envelope. You can also write questions for yourself if you need to research the photo.

Captions not only provide information about a photo or illustration, they can be “teasers” in and of themselves, drawing the reader in. Most people, before they read a book in its entirety, will skim through the book first, looking at pictures and reading captions and other design elements to get the gist of the story. For some, looking at the images and reading the captions is as far as they will ever read.

A good caption:

- clearly identifies the subject of the picture, without detailing the obvious
- provides names, dates, places that will be helpful to the viewer this year, or in 100 years
- is “attached” to the picture or document but is not a part of it (the captions should not be written over the image).



Step 5

Digitize—Scan Your Photos and Documents

We love originals. Even if you feel that select items should be saved in their tangible, native quality, they take up a lot of room and are more difficult to share. Who gets the one of a kind family scrapbook? Once an asset is in a digital environment it can be saved and shared more easily. Part of the purpose of curation is to preserve your assets so they can be shared now and in the future. Digitizing them is part of that process.

Photos that you will save for your archive and potential printing require a much higher resolution and quality standard than photos for email or web use. Trying to print an image that has been scanned at a low resolution and/or as a compressed low-quality jpeg will result in the image being blurry or fuzzy, or with jagged, blocky edges known as jpeg artifacts.

It is very important to scan your pictures properly. We won't go into much detail here, except to say that you need a high quality scan — at least 300 dpi, 600 dpi preferred. Tiffs are preferred to jpegs, but jpegs are acceptable IF they are saved at the highest quality setting.

Proper digitizing is important to your archive. Get help if you need it. We have much more information about scanning on our blog and website at: picturesandstories.com.



Step 6

Create a Digital & Physical Archive

A quality archive or collection of your personal and family history assets should take advantage of the best of both the digital and physical worlds.

Now and in the future both your digital and physical assets need to be:

- **valuable** — an item you have deliberately selected
- **available** — need to know how and where to find it (secure and accessible)
- **identifiable** — need to clearly recognize what each asset is
- **usable** — in serviceable, working condition

A digital archive can and should be in at least two locations, and in at least two different media storage devices at once. When we deliver an archive to a client we will generally save at least two sets of the digital data to a Milleniata M-Disc, USB thumb drive, and SD Flash card with a printed and hardcover bound pictorial index with caption information and unique numbering. We then recommend that they save and share their archive to a hard drive and some form of cloud storage.

Sharing the digital archive with other family members helps keep it safe and easy to use.

Museums very carefully control their storage and display conditions. Though your home may not be climate controlled here are some things to consider:

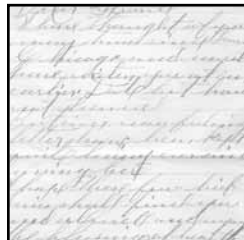
heat light moisture chemicals access

Keep your photos and other assets away from sunlight or any other light, in an acid free container, in a cool, dry place.

Keep a record of where you put things.

Once you create a physical and a digital archive, think about creating a beautiful keepsake book. Take a look at our website: picturesandstories.com. We would love to help.

Inventory Your Life Story Assets



Next Steps

SAVE IT!

SHARE IT!

Congratulations! You have accomplished something that everyone thinks is a good idea, but few actually get around to.

The key is to always go back and ask yourself, Why am I doing this? and, who am I doing this for? This will motivate you and focus your efforts.

As in a museum collection, it's important to collect and save stuff in a protected place. But the true value of a collection is realized when it is shared with others. In your personal museum, make a plan to share these fantastic personal and family history assets with others.

Here are some ideas to share your curated collection.

WWII - Chapter Book

My mom is 88 years old. About a year and a half ago she moved out of her home into an assisted living home. Moving forces us all to deal with all the things we have collected over the years—particularly the personal stuff. Does it go with you, or GO someplace else? Too often, without a little curating, it sits around for a while, then goes to the trash.

Mom is not a hoarder; she has been organizing and preparing and giving things away over the years. But she still had boxes and boxes of photos, documents, scrapbooks, yearbooks, slides, memorabilia, newspaper clippings, letters, and on and on. They were fairly well organized, but when you or your parents move to a different (often smaller) place, what happens to that stuff?

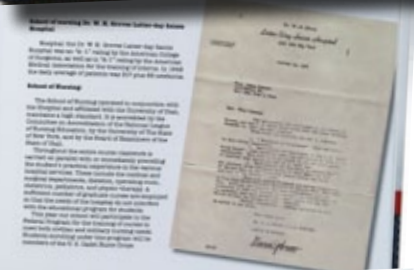
My sister and brother helped me make a quick sort. Then we organized them further, and I created a digital archive and the resulting book.

My mom and dad (who passed away ten years ago) are part of what Tom Brokaw referred to as the “Greatest Generation.” World War II was a pivotal time in the history of the world and the

young people who participated in the war and building the country afterwards made a difference in their communities, their families, and in the world. My parents were a part of that.

A few months ago, seeing that Christmas was coming, Mom wanted to give her children and grandchildren something different and meaningful. As I looked into their newly created archive, it was now easier to focus, and to choose a segment of their lives to share. That's how the book: *Cadet Nurse & Fighter Pilot, Our Parents During WWII* was born. A small (80-page) hardcover book was printed and bound for each of her children and grandchildren. Her project was not a complete, comprehensive, chronological account, but a snapshot of their lives during that period.

At the family gathering, when her gift was opened simultaneously by all, there was silence at first as everyone began reading. Then smiles, and words of genuine appreciation. Everyone loved Grandma's gift.



Family History Archive

One client began with boxes and papers scattered around her parents' home that had been accumulating for 50+ years. She organized them by person, time period, and topic, culled and selected the best assets and narrowed several thousand random items down to 2,170 items in 32 folders. Some items such as the WWII letters (pictured in binder) were ordered by date and scanned as a PDF, making the documents easier to access and follow sequentially.

All the photos and documents (some with back sides as well) were scanned at 600 ppi, then uniquely numbered within each folder. Textual narrative documents were also included as MS Word files and as PDF documents. Each item was captioned with identifying information. A 172-page pictorial hardcover index book was created for each of the siblings and digital files were saved to USB flash drives, SD cards, and Milleniata Blue Ray M-Discs which were included inside the front cover of the archive books. A table of contents was created and named to match the data on the storage media, making it easy to locate when needed.

The project was organized into two plastic file folder containers (only one is shown). Now each sibling's family has immediate access to family historical photos and documents. If one sibling were to have something happen to their archive, all the data would still be available.



Family Farm Book, Video & Archive

One of our clients—a family who wanted to create a book to memorialize the family farm that had just been sold to make way for a golf course—was convinced that they had very few old pictures to use in their book. We went to the farm and took a number of pictures before the buildings were torn down.

But when we began interviewing the siblings, an extraordinary thing happened. As they began to tell stories of growing up on the farm, little by little they began to recall photographs they had seen of themselves, their parents, and the farm as children. They dug a little deeper into drawers and attics, talking with each other and their children, trading ideas about where such treasures might be hidden. Before long they had amassed a treasure trove of photographs, as well as letters, postcards, newspaper clippings, even a special rocking chair and an antique split-cup wooden wall telephone which we photographed for inclusion in the book. These items, as they were found and shared, continued to evoke memorable stories which were also included in their book.

Along with their book and documentary video we created a digital archive of the images on disc which was fixed inside the cover of their hardcover pictorial index book. It was a simple matter to quickly skim the pages of the archive book, identify the pictures currently needed, pop the archive disc into a computer and instantly extract high resolution images. These images could then be used for family gatherings, school reports, or any other purpose.



Archive with Books & Narrated Slide Show

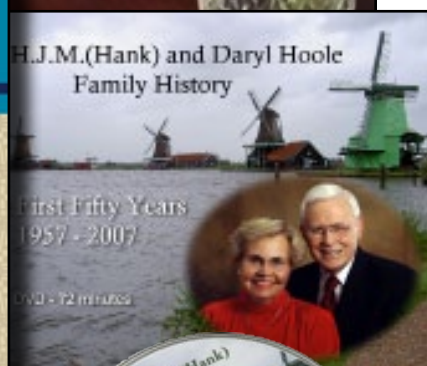
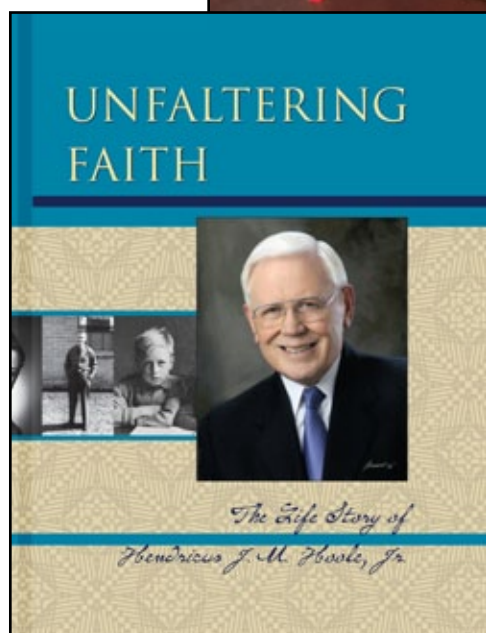
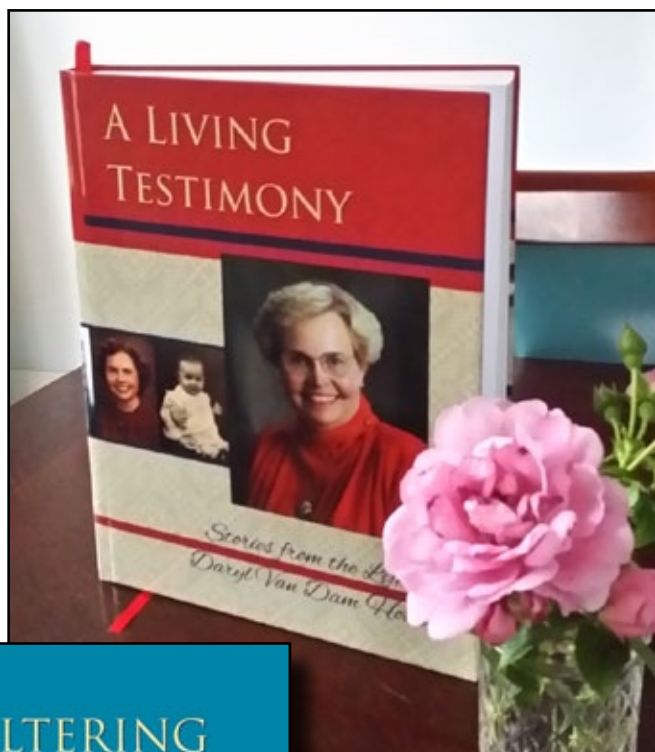
Daryl and Hank Hoole are two clients that have been an absolute joy to work with. They recognize the value of saving those things of value and preserving them to be shared with their family for generations.

Hank wrote and published his book first. We loved hearing stories of how the grandkids stayed up at night reading stories about their grandfather. Hank passed away last year and his book continues to inspire with his stories of faith, hard work, and his loving nature.

Daryl is an efficiency expert and the author of the bestselling *The Art of Homemaking* and many other books about homemaking, family, and child rearing. Over the course of her career teaching organizational skills she saved over 30 binders packed with photos, experiences, lessons learned, along with other things she thought may of value to her posterity. Daryl boiled down her materials into the most valuable and interesting elements for her family in her book, *A Living Testimony*.

Daryl and Hank gathered up over 500 pictures of their family life and travels and recorded a short voice narration for each picture. These were then edited into an engaging slide show with Daryl's voice telling the story of their life's adventures.





Simplify and Streamline Your Life Story Assets

1. Locate and identify your personal and family history assets.
2. Decide what is important to you.
3. Organize your materials. Sort. Sift. Cull. Prioritize. Caption.
4. Digitize—Scan Your Assets
5. Create Your Archive: Digital and Physical — Save Your Archive in Multiple Formats & Places
6. Prepare and Share — Focus on a facet of your life and present that aspect in a book.



What is more important to life: air or water? A dumb question—both are essential. Is it better to save your life story assets digitally or in a physical form? Both. We are advocates of digital storage—we are also champions of being able to put your hands on something real.

If you want your life story assets to be enjoyed and appreciated, they need to be available. They need to last. They need to be found. They need to be seen. The best and most secure way to ensure your assets will be used and enjoyed, now and in the future, is to first digitize them—and then put them in a book.

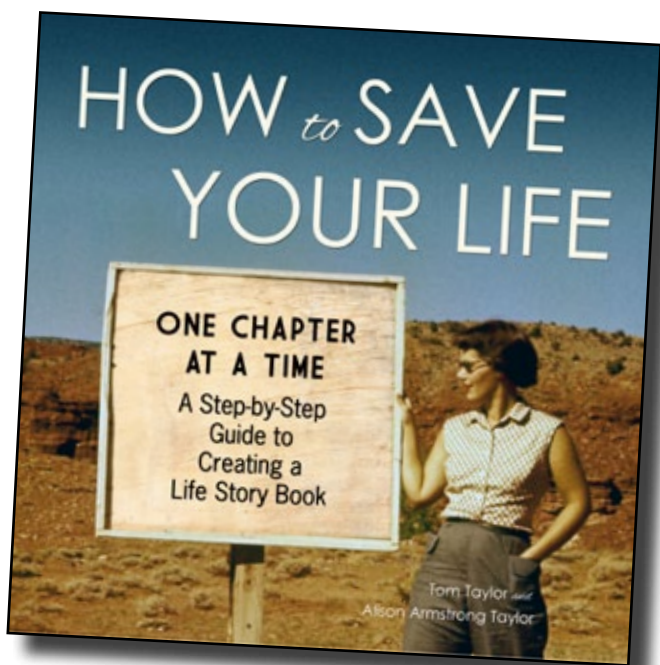
YOUR LIFE. IN A BOOK.™

We love the digital world, but there is nothing like a book. The printing press is believed by many to be the most important innovation of the past 1,000 years. Maybe someday the internet will eclipse tangible printed materials altogether, but we doubt it. In order to make sure your legacy will be around for the next 1,000 years, or even the next twenty years, you'd better put it in a book.

- A book requires no power source.
- It will not become obsolete or require upgrading to a different format in order to be read on state-of-the-moment equipment.
- You can casually pick it up, leaf through it, skim it, flip its pages, read just the captions, or read it backwards if you desire.
- A book, if cared for properly, will be easier to find and read fifty or more years from now than, say, a blog post from the year 2013.

When your future great-great-grandchild wants to do a school report about your life, where is he going to go to find out about you? To your Facebook account? Perhaps, but we wouldn't want to count on it.

We just don't know what kind of technology will be available in the future. Perhaps there will be one universal, easily accessible digital library where anyone can go to find anything about their ancestors or historical figures. Every day someone invents a new way to upload, store, and share photos and personal stories online. We are not by any means trying to discourage the use of these services. But if you create a digital database AND a physical book, then all your bases will be covered.



Get the help you need. Ask others, hire your grandkids, take a class, get professional assistance. But don't wait. Whether you want to hire a professional or do it yourself, we can help.

How to Save Your Life—One Step at a Time takes you through the process of creating a life story book, step by step, from writing to photos to design and publishing, in a friendly and engaging way. The book is available at www.picturesandstories.com

- How to dig up memories
 - How to capture story ideas
 - How to choose your best stories
 - How to write if you can't write
 - How to find plot, theme, and flow
 - How to edit your first draft
 - How to get unstuck
 - How to organize photos
 - How to select and prepare pictures
 - How to properly scan photos
 - How to choose the right pictures
 - How to avoid pitfalls
 - How to hire a designer—or do it yourself
 - How to design a cover
 - How to find a printer
- **How to GET IT DONE**

My father was a WWII pilot and over the course of his later life he built three airplanes with a close friend. A friend, recognizing that it was no small task, asked, "How do you build an airplane?" Dad replied, "You have a plan, and you start."

It's the same with curating your life story assets. We can provide you with a plan. Now, it's up to you to get going.

We hope you have found this booklet helpful. We have instructional videos, tools, and many more ideas to support you on our website at:

www.picturesandstories.com

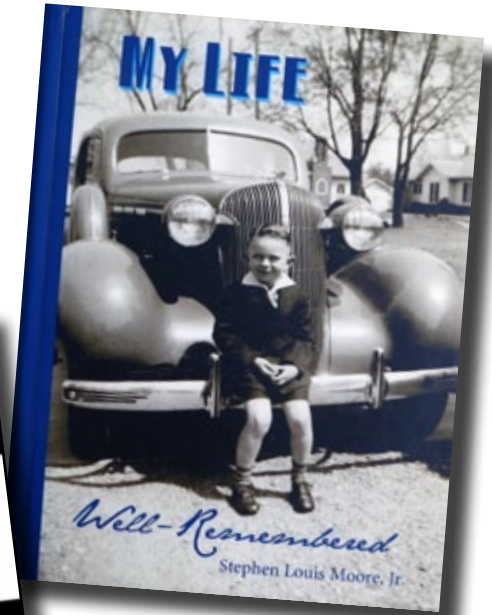
If we can help you directly, we would love to! That's what we do. Give us a call or e-mail us at:

tom@picturesandstories.com

(801) 906-0609

We wish you the best in curating your personal and family history assets. Thanks.

Tom & Alison Taylor



Do something you will never regret. Your life is worth saving. Start NOW!