

Share Your Story

Quick Start Guide for Helping a Loved-one Write a Personal History

Recording a personal history for yourself or for an aging or terminally ill loved one is a daunting task. How do you condense an entire life into a few words? If you are overwhelmed, take a deep breath. This is doable. We are going to break the process down into some bite-sized chunks



Step 1: Record

THE FIRST STEP IS THE EASIEST. IT'S ALSO THE MOST URGENT.

Once your loved-one passes away, their library of stories is gone as well, so don't delay this doing this part. You're going to need a recording of the story you want to preserve. It can be a video recording or an audio recording. When you start the process of making a recording, keep the following in mind:

- Make a backup recording *just in case*. Always have a second device recording the interview just in case of a technical glitch.
- Take some time to get the audio right. Use a good microphone or headphones with a mic. Record indoors in a quiet, carpeted room, and try to eliminate all background noise like the dog barking or the swamp cooler running in the background.
- Visit "[Playdatebox.com/questions](https://www.playdatebox.com/questions)" for dozens of lists of interesting questions you can ask your subject.



The First Interview:

START WITH SIMPLE!

Try a single five-minute interview using these simple steps:

1. Open your smartphone and set your camera on a stable surface. If you are recording video, use a camera tripod if you have one. Press “record” and ask a question.
2. When the story is finished, save a backup of the recording somewhere where it will be safe.

3. Share the recorded video or audio recording with other family members and sit back and wait for them to ask you to send more!

If this interview is all you ever record, you will have preserved something priceless.



if you are ready to record more, read on for more ideas for expanding your library of recorded family stories:

Think "Archival Quality"

Invest in some inexpensive tools so you get top-quality audio and video

Everything you record and digitize will be used by many future generations, so take a little time to make the quality as professional as possible.

An Olympus Voice Recorder WS-853 is a great low-cost option for audio recording.

If you are recording video, study your device to make certain you are recording at the highest possible quality. Take time to get the lighting right and make sure the background is attractive.

If you can't record in person, try recording via videoconference. Zoom.us offers this feature. With a Rev.com live transcriptions add-on to your Zoom account, you can record closed captions you can use later as a transcription.



Step 2: Gather Photos and Documents

CREATE DIGITIZED (ELECTRONIC) COPIES OF IMPORTANT PHOTOS AND DOCUMENTS

Help your subject gather 10- 20 original photos of their life. Choose a room with great diffused lighting (like near a window that lets in natural light) and take new photos of the originals using your smartphone or DSLR camera. Crop and edit them as needed. Take notes on who is in the photos so you can add detailed captions later. These photos can be used to enhance video as well since they can be inserted as "B-roll" images that fade in and out as the audio from your interview plays in the background.

If you want digital copies of original photos but lack access to high-quality scanning equipment, there may be a Family History Library in your area. These libraries are built and sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and use of the facilities is free. Many public libraries or also offer use of scanning equipment. There are also services that will digitize your photos and documents for a fee.

Step 3: Transcribe

SOME SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

The stories you record stand the best chance of being preserved if you turn them into written documents that can be duplicated and shared. You can transcribe an interview several different ways. Here are the three that I use most often:

1. Find a reputable transcription company and pay to have the recording transcribed by a human. **Rev.com** is one company that is currently leading the industry. At this writing, a human transcription costs about \$1.25 per minute of recorded material.
2. If a human transcription is too costly, an AI transcription (artificial intelligence transcription done by a machine) may get you close enough to perfect to be worth the expense. **Temi.com** and **HappyScribe.com** are two services I have used with good success. You'll need to spend time making corrections to an AI transcription, and sometimes the time you saved with the machine transcription gets lost again when you start the tedious editing.

These services get more and more accurate all the time, so this option may be worth considering. The most budget-friendly solution is to do the transcription yourself the old-fashioned way by listening and re-typing what was said.

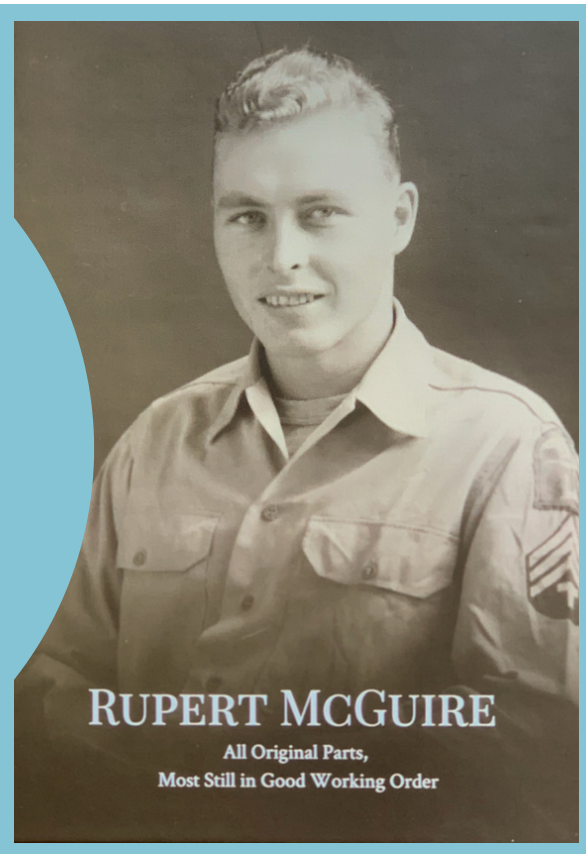
3. **OTranscribe.com** is a free web app that allows you to upload an audio or video file that you can transcribe using your own computer (much like an old-fashioned dictation machine). When you pause the uploaded file, OTranscribe automatically rewinds it a bit so you can back up and catch anything you missed.



A transcription with good timestamps simplifies the video editing process and saves editing time. You can highlight sections of text you want in your finished product and then locate them quickly in your video feed.

Whether a simple Word document with a few photos added in or a full-color printed book, you are creating a priceless treasure for your family.

Research proves knowing our family stories helps build resilience in future generations.



Step 4: Assemble and Edit

THIS IS WHERE YOU TURN YOUR INTERVIEW INTO A WORK OF ART. PUT THE STORIES AND THE IMAGES TOGETHER IN ONE BEAUTIFUL, SHAREABLE PACKAGE.

A printed, bound book or an edited video production are both possible finished products. I won't cover video editing here. If it's a hobby you enjoy, creating edited videos from your family stories is a magical way to preserve someone's story. You have the benefit of voice, face, and personality in a medium that written text can't quite convey. A professional videographer can help you create a finished product as well.

For a printed book, the market is robust and there are many options. The system I prefer to use is a free "print on demand" option from [Blurb.com](https://www.blurb.com). You'll download a free software called [Bookwright](https://www.blurb.com/bookwright) (<https://www.blurb.com/bookwright>) and design your book yourself. Bookwright has templates available that will simplify the process. When you are finished designing, Blurb.com will print full-color copies for you.



Step 5: Share!

THIS IS WHERE YOU TURN YOUR INTERVIEW INTO A WORK OF ART. PUT THE STORIES AND THE IMAGES TOGETHER IN ONE BEAUTIFUL, SHAREABLE PACKAGE.

Now that all of the hard work is complete, look for ways to share your collection of stories so that future generations have access to them. Make copies for family and close friends. If you are a U.S. veteran, consider submitting copies of your history and the supporting documents to the [Library of Congress Veteran's History Project](#).

You can create a free account at [FamilySearch.org](#) or a paid account at [Ancestry.com](#) and share your story and memories where other members of your immediate and extended family can access them as downloadable files that will be accessible for generations to come.

I wish you the very best as you embark on this fun journey. Don't get discouraged if it takes time! The personal histories I create professionally often take me more than a year to assemble.

You can record a significant chunk of a family member's life history in four to six hourlong recordings. Remember, the recording part is the most urgent. Once the person dies, her stories die too. Don't delay this part. Get the recordings as soon as possible.

Best wishes to you in this important journey. You will bless generations of future descendants!

-Lynnae W. Allred
[Playdatebox.com](#)