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TELL THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE

It's easier than ever to preserve your legacy for kids and grandkids in a video, a book or a digital archive

BY MAISY FERNANDEZ

How much do your loved ones know about your life? Beyond the broad strokes of career and interests, do they understand what milestones shaped you? Or know about the times you persevered through personal struggle? Or experienced smiles, tears or laughs?

Preserving your life story is easier than ever today, and the benefits are plentiful—for everyone. “The really profound value comes in children and future generations,” says Steve Pender, president of Arizona-based Family Legacy Video Inc. “When someone passes away without passing on the family stories and life stories, it’s like a library burning down.”

Luckily, there are many services to record your life journey, saving you from a standoff with a blank page and no idea where to begin.



HIRE A VIDEOGRAPHER

In creating a half-hour documentary in the 1990s on his grandmother—who was the primary keeper of her family history—Pender realized the power of video memoirs. “People now can hear these stories firsthand, instead of in part or thirdhand,” he says. “Years later, we’ve got the young adults who were the kids back then, who are getting acquainted with her through this video.”

Pender created Family Legacy Video to offer this service to others, completing his first video production in 2004. Other small production companies that do similar work can be found across the United States.

Shooting the subject while telling his or her story takes a day or more, with a camera crew, gear and lighting, and sometimes even a makeup artist. The crew may shoot other



footage, too, such as at a former workplace or showing the subject engaged in a hobby.

Often, it’s not the elder storyteller who

seeks the service but rather that person’s child. “The more we get into the process and they reflect on their lives and see what they’ve accomplished, it validates that they have lived a meaningful life and have stories worth passing on,” Pender says.

A professionally produced video can take as long as a month to complete, while making a full documentary-style film might take closer to four months.

Cara Tollefson prepares Catherine Johnson for a video for the Blom family in Minneapolis.

