

Five Things All Family Historians Should Do Before They Die

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1. Tell your own story!

So many individuals have amazing amounts of family history data that reside only in their own minds. Too often, there is the belief that such data will eventually get recorded and shared. The majority of the times, however, it doesn't.

Your experiences, your thoughts, in your own words—it's the best gift you can give to your family and descendants. Your story is our history. The process of telling your story will often highlight areas for further exploration, and likely identify individuals you should engage to tell their stories as a part of your family history.

Digital audio and digital video recording devices enable more preserving and sharing of family stories than ever before. And the power of story continues to be explored, with an increasing number of benefits being brought to light. (*NGS Magazine*, July-Sept 2017, v. 43, n. 3, pg. 23-26)

2. Interview as many relatives, friends, and colleagues as possible.

An unbelievable number of consequential stories live exclusively in the minds of family and friends. This living history is of great consequence in knowing and telling our family stories. This information can also fill in gaps in our knowledge about an individual or family line as well as lead to new sources of exploration. The activities surrounding preparing for an interview and then executing that interview can be enlightening by themselves. We simply cannot have enough stories.



3. Organize your research!

Years of research is nice; having that research organized and compiled so that others may enjoy it, benefit from it, and build upon it is infinitely better. A good question to ask: Am I a family historian or a “stuff gatherer?” Many gather numerous documents and key select pieces of data into online trees or other genealogical data management programs. While some save such “gatherings” in multiple places and on multiple media, few actually organize the research and write the story. We must do better.

Select a genealogical data management program that matches your skill and comfort levels. Then key, link, and contextualize all information you have about each ancestor. Make your files

make sense. Claiming that you can find it is of little consequence to future researchers. Will a descendant be able understand what you have gathered?

Technology enables each of us to leave our stories for descendants we will never meet—actually leave our voices and moving images of ourselves. Work already being accomplished with applications in the artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) fields means I potentially can have a conversation with the great grandchildren of my great grandchildren! And the possibilities are growing nearly exponentially. However, it's only possible if our research is robust, sourced, and organized.

4. Deal with your images!

Collectively we are taking more than one trillion pictures each year. At the same time our images are at greater risk than ever. Some of that risk takes the form of extremely poor saving and sharing practices. Images saved on smart devices that are not consistently downloaded and tagged with appropriate metadata run a high risk of being lost. Many and varied storage devices are available, with higher and higher capacities at increasingly affordable rates.

First and foremost, dealing with our images means they won't be lost. Dealing with our images—organizing, preserving, and describing—also affords us and those interested in our families the opportunity to take fuller advantage of facial recognition software and well as QBIC programs—programs that can search images by content, i.e. query by image content. A picture is worth a thousand words, right?!



5. Explore new technologies.

Collectively we too often treat technology in the family history space as a spectator sport. Our abilities to pursue, preserve, and present our stories is greatly enhanced when we continue to deploy contemporary technologies. Some technology begging to be deployed in the genealogy space is referenced under “Organize Your Research!” Two other suggestions are below.

Eastman’s Online Genealogy Newsletter provides the opportunity to sample products, sites, and services as well as some of the latest technology news in the family history space. First, sign-up. Second, at least a couple of times a year, challenge yourself to actively explore a technology mentioned in this electronic newsletter.

At RootsTech, one finds an amazing amount of deployable innovation on display and available for use. While attending the conference provides maximum benefit, much can be found at the RootsTech website as well. Select a few items each year to use in enhancing and enriching your family history pursuits, and then use them.