



## Stories Worth Saving

Every family carries its own keepsakes. Some may have tangible value, such as jewelry, paintings, or baseball cards. Others have sentimental value, like photo albums, baby blankets, or toys. In most cases, the dollar value of these items is far less important than their role in a family's story.

### **A Sense of Belonging**

For Robyn Fivush, a professor of psychology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and author of *Family Narratives and the Development of an Autobiographical Self*, her grandmother's candlesticks evoke strong memories. The candlesticks remind her of celebrating Sabbath services together and "make me feel a sense of history and tradition that extends beyond me," she says.

These family stories "are important for the individual living in the present," Fivush says. "They give us a sense of meaning and resilience that our family is a source of stability, love, and connection. We're not adrift; we belong somewhere."

### **Passing It Down**

Stories and mementos transferred from one generation to the next can have a major impact on the younger generation. Based on her research, Fivush says, younger adults who are told these stories and understand what these keepsakes mean "have higher self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and less anxiety. They are more secure in who they are and consider their family an anchor in a difficult world."

Not all stories conveyed from grandparent down to the next generation are uplifting. Some families



have dark histories that can require a “lot of family story repair work,” Fivush says. But in most cases, these family treasures and tales “provide a cocoon that we’re not alone, that there’s a network of people who love and support us, and that even through difficult times, we can be resilient,” she says.

For Adrienne Waterman, the cofounder and CEO of Not Forgotten, a company that produces digital archives of families, the focus of heirlooms “is preserving intergenerational wealth and wisdom and will also help you secure your family’s financial future.” It helps pass the torch from the family’s past into the family’s future.

Waterman acknowledges that family valuables, such as jewels, diamonds, and watches, help build intergenerational wealth, but for many, “the intoxicating stories behind the creation or acquisition of that heirloom make them priceless for a family.”

Not Forgotten helps preserve a family’s traditions through video interviews, hybrid storage for physical tapes and digital media, and video archives. Waterman says that a family’s story invariably focuses on several themes—its lessons, values, mission, and family traditions. These can include family Christmas traditions or their story of survival. Its videographers attend memorial services and film eulogies to ensure a family’s legacy is preserved.

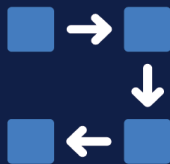
Waterman says the best time to start preserving a family’s history occurs at a pivotal moment in a family member’s life, like a grandparent’s retirement, a grandchild’s graduation from college, a couple getting married, or the birth of a first child. When a younger family member begins creating wealth and building their own family, that is also a propitious time to start the process.



## Tips to Preserve a Family's Legacy:



**Tip #1:** Waterman says, “Be as purposeful about your family’s legacy and wisdom as you are about your financial planning.”



**Tip #2:** Be proactive about starting the process. Don’t wait until someone is facing a life-or-death situation. Consider starting the process upon retirement,

when the eldest in the family is still mentally sharp and can be totally engaged in the process.



**Tip #3:** Get involved in the video tapings. “There’s nothing richer than your facial expression and you explaining the way you lived,” notes Waterman.

Make sure you create your own videotape, because “based on privacy issues, people don’t trust social media

When Denise May Levernick, a blogger at The Family Curator, received a trunk filled with her grandmother’s old photos, papers, and memorabilia, she became the family archivist to sort it all out. In the process, Levernick learned a few secrets from her family’s history, including stories of a kidnapping, a custody battle, and a disappearance that turned out to be an elopement.



The family knowledge gained through these heirlooms has had a positive effect on her son, who resides in the Boston area. He learned that his great-grandfather was a drummer and soldier in the Revolutionary War. When he took his children on the Freedom Trail and traveled to Concord, Massachusetts, seeing locations from the war meant a lot to them because of their family heritage.

When keeping these family mementos in a family of multiple siblings, Levenick advises picking numbers out of a hat so everyone has a chance to get their first choice and no one feels slighted.

## How to be a Family Archivist

Here are a few additional tips that Levenick offers when a family member becomes the family archivist:

- Decide on exactly what your role is. In most cases, you're preserving items for future generations.
- Be selective about what you keep. You don't have unlimited space. Scan and digitize photos to save space.
- Pay attention to storage. Buy some office supply folders because they're acid-free. Don't keep things in the garage or attic because the temperature fluctuation can ruin them.
- Move papers into archival storage boxes or metal filing cabinets in your house, and keep them away from light, which ruins documents, photos, and textiles.

Financial advisors can also play a role in helping their clients assemble these family heirlooms because it's part of a "holistic approach to retirement planning that goes beyond money," says Steve Morton, a CAPTRUST financial advisor based in Greensboro, North Carolina. "Since advisors help with estate planning, finding ways to preserve family heirlooms can be part of that process."

Morton says that when his dad died, there was a trunkful of photographs left, but Morton didn't know who most of the people in the photos were. Cousins? Friends? Ideally, assembling these family mementos should take place before the death of a loved one.

Letting a loved one know what a favorite pendant meant to someone, where they bought it, and what it symbolizes turns an object into a family memory, says Morton. Preparing a video to explain what the heirloom means helps children or grandchildren understand its significance. "Understanding the story deepens the meaning," he says.

Almost every family Waterman has dealt with has been surprised by the outcomes of seeing family members interviewed and recorded. "None of us sit around the dinner table and say, 'Dad, what's your secret to your happiness?' In a video, what you learn about people you love is extraordinary."



Several specialized companies help preserve these family heirlooms and provide time capsules and video memories, such as Not Forgotten, Try Saga, Farewelling, Lastly, Memorify, and Safe Beyond.