

County Connections

Harvey County Genealogical Society



January 2018

Your Life - Your Story. It's Time To Sharpen Your Pencil.

My grandfather's great uncle, Dr. Samuel Martin, interviewed and researched his family history, taking our family far back into the 1600's in Ireland. Such a rich treasure! Sadly, he never took the time to write it out in a way that he could pass along to his children. When he died, his 2nd wife took his boxes of research out into the yard and set them on fire. She was having issues with his children and decided that would want - or should benefit from - his "junk." Dr. Martin had spent so much time working on his genealogy for the benefit of his children that the 2nd Mrs. Martin resented it entirely. He never compiled it for his children, however, and all of that research is gone and *to this date we've not been able to even begin to "jump the pond."*

For most genealogists, the greatest joy is in following the clues and finding the pieces to the family puzzle. Organizing the research isn't usually the highest of priorities. Writing out all of the completed research into a readable document seems to often be a goal that seldom is started - let alone completed.

There are so many reasons to get your research into writing, and the most important reason of all is simply to insure that it is not lost to the ages. **Write it to share it.** It doesn't have to be fancy, but it has to be more than scratches on a sticky note! So make this the year that you will write out what you've already researched! Let's go - we'll do it together.

Create Your Master Document

With today's word processors, none of us has an excuse not to write our stories. You can work on it as you have time - the key to success is simply to have a SINGLE place to record those stories. As anything comes to your mind, you can write it down there - with the word processor your stories can always be moved around later. The key is to get it all in one place. Open a blank document and type your name. See - you've begun! If you have Microsoft Word, highlight your name and click "Heading 1" from the styles menu. Now under your name, type something like "Early Years," highlight it, and click "Heading 2" from the styles menu. Hit enter a couple of times and type something like "Childhood Years," highlight it, and click "Heading 2" from the styles menu.

Click "View" and then select "Navigation Pane" and you will see your outline beginning to build on the left side of the screen. Now, just begin writing. You can move things around and add subtitles whenever you want to, so when you get an idea, just write about it anywhere you'd like and organize it all later.

It's best to write whenever you're in the mind to, but it's also important to set a firm appointment with your keyboard. Perhaps every Sunday afternoon for an hour. Maybe Friday evenings while watching TV. The most important thing is that you actually sit down and DO it.

Start With Yourself

The easiest place to start is with yourself. Don't think of writing TO yourself, or even to your children. **Write with your great grandchildren in mind**, telling them all of the things that they would otherwise never know about you. This is your tribute to your own life, so don't be modest. Answer all of the questions about your life that you wish your great grandparents had written you about theirs.

For many people, it's easiest to organize your life story in a chronological order. Others prefer a topical approach, but however is easiest for you to write is the best way to do it. Your early years include your birth, so start there. Where were you born? Was it at home or in a hospital? Where is that part of the State and why were your parents living there? When were you born? Who were your older siblings? What have you heard about your earliest years? Did you move between houses or cities before you started school? What is your earliest memory?

Your childhood years will be focused on that time when you were in elementary school. What schools did you attend? Who were your teachers? Which did you like most, and why? Who were your playmates and what did you play? What do you remember about your classes and your interests? Where did you move during those years? What do you remember about each home you lived in? What about your pets? Did the family take any vacations during those years? What was life like at home? What were your favorite things? What stories do you remember? *[I never had a goldfish, but I had a pet hamster named "Hammy." My sister got a hamster and hers was mean and bit her all the time, but Hammy never did bite anyone...]*

Remember to write about everything you think about. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Don't think that "nobody will care about that" because, you know deep down that your great grandchildren WILL care about that. *[I remember penny jawbreakers at John's Market, and a \$5.00 sack of groceries at Mammel's Jack & Jill Foodliner. I remember the Hutch Drive-In for cheeseburgers and chili dogs, and the Sno Cone stand for a cherry sundae on super-special occasions].* Remember cars with "wings" and actually having to "roll down" your windows? **Your descendants won't!**

Move on to High School, then to College, then to Married Life, then to Retirement. Every week or two move on to another chapter of your life. Don't leave out ANY important details or stories. Explain where you moved, and why. Explain where you worked, and how you got that job, or maybe why you left it to pursue another. What Church did you attend? What stores did you shop at? *[Before computers, we used typewriters and when you really made a mistake, you had to re-type the entire page from scratch... Wait! How DID you survive without computers?]*

You've gotten a good start, if you've answered these questions. Add anything else you can remember. As you get new thoughts and stories and memories that pop into your head, write them down. You don't have to go into detail yet if you don't want to - just add them to your list to explain later. **You're painting a picture of your life on this blank canvas, and you'll be adding all sorts of color and depth as you go along.** Tell the tales of your life while you can. Nobody will ever be able to convey the richness of your life to your descendants if you don't take a little time now to do it. Your story deserves to be told in greater detail, your lasting tribute more than just a 3-line death notice in the newspaper.

I'll check back on your progress in March...

PAPER DRIVE TOMORROW
MAY 29, 8 a.m. till 1 p.m.
Valley Pride School

The **County Connections** is published by Darren McMannis on behalf of the Harvey County Genealogical Society, for the benefit & use of all its members. www.HarveyCountyRoots.com