

Translating Family Secrets: Writing for Your Grandkids by Hazel Edwards

Published in Working Writer Jan/Feb 2014

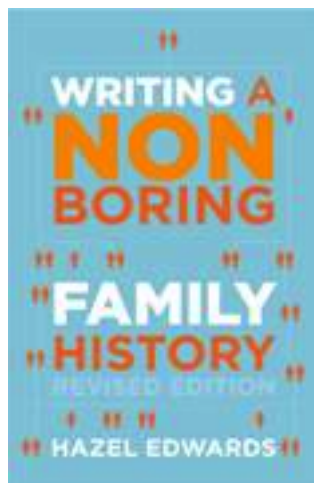
www.workingwriter1.com

What's a wireless?

What did you do if you didn't have television?

How did you get to school?

What did you do for fun when you were a kid?



Why Write Your Stories?

Instead of “digital” and “iPod,” you had words like “wireless” or “ice-chest.” You need to translate the past for your grandchildren because you lived in a different world. Making-do in wartime or as a migrant or pioneer demanded a different creativity from computer gaming.

Maybe you’ve been to a reunion or funeral recently, and swapped family stories about funny or embarrassing things which happened in your childhood. You’d like to share these with your children or grandchildren.

How can you shape your stories in a way so family will want to read or listen?

Writing a book may not be the only way. How about an audio story? Photographic record from scanning old photos? An electronic book?

Maybe your family structure has changed recently. Some have joined or left or been blended? You’d like to explain your family’s past ways of living and working and why the various characters in your extended family acted as they did. Not all were eccentric, gifted, or broke.

Shaping or Crafting Stories

The reality is that you might have a great story to tell, but it will need to be shaped or crafted for your prospective audience. Maybe your grandchild is six and just learning to read, or seventeen and never separated from his cell phone.

From my “Writing a NON Boring Family History” workshops, the most common answer to the question “Why are you writing your family history?” is: “For my children.”

The reality is that many of those “children,” who may even be adult, are not interested in reading family stories NOW but they may be later. Unless you record the stories, they will be lost as your memories fade or you may run out of energy or time. More importantly, you need to shape them in a format that appeals, which could be email, photos, audio, or even scrapbooks. So, here are some hints.

Twenty Hints:

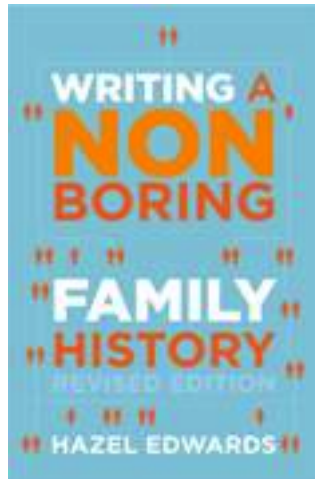
- Consider your potential audience. Who is going to read this? Be honest. Son? Daughter? Grandchild?
- Choose a title to attract THAT reader or audience.
- Which information and in which order? Six-year-olds are more fascinated by elephant poo than the cultural aspects of elephants in Sri Lanka.
- Just choose one incident. You can't tell a lifetime in five minutes.
- Hook them with the opening; “Did you ever hear about the time . . .” What went wrong? This provides the drama.
- Keep a twist for the end.
- Trial the story by telling it aloud, several times. Check where the questions are asked. Answer them in the next version.
- Tall stories are allowable where the truth is stretched a little in the interests of entertainment.
- Secrets in one generation may be news to another. Tact and diplomacy may be necessary.
- Format? Does it have sound effects? Do you have pictures, photos, or mementos to show?
- Food is the sex of children's stories, so make sure you include what food was eaten at special events: birthdays, weddings, seasonal treats, extraordinary or ordinary events.
- Make comparisons between then and now. What did you do on an average school day? Rules? Games? Food? Homework? How did you get to school? Did you go to Sunday school?
- What kind of work did you do? Where? Tools? Bad things? Fun times?
- Any pets? Hobbies? Did you get into trouble?
- Where did you live? What was your home like? How many in the family? Did brothers and sisters share?
- What were you good at doing?
- What were you hopeless at doing?
- Length? Any story must be less than yawn length. Optimistically, attention span is one minute per one year. An eight-year-old will listen for about 8 minutes, but only if there is suspense.
- Recycling. Maybe you can tell the same story in different formats or for different age groups, e.g., about a family pet or an embarrassing moment.
- Enjoy the telling and then the audience will, too.

www.hazeledwards.com

Then What?

Check the Internet for links to writing or family history organizations. If you do an Internet search at www.google.com with the words Family History or Genealogy, you'll find relevant sites.

Hazel's website www.hazeledwards.com has workshop details as well as an online e-bookstore.



<http://www.hazeledwards.com/shop/item/writing-a-non-boring-family-history>