

THE HEALING POWER OF **BIOGRAPHY**

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newsletter
Personal
biographer
Sheridan Hill

*Your
biography
becomes
your
biology.*
-Carolyn
Myss, Ph.D.



Looking back--reflecting on where you have been--can better position you to face the future.

What is a personal biography?

Your story,
beautifully written,
illustrated with your
photographs,
expertly designed
and printed in a
hardback book
made to last several
hundred years.

One client
described it by
saying, *Sheridan
combined my parents'
story with world and
local history to set the
context, checking facts
and researching lineage.
This will be a treasure
for generations to come.*

A growing number of medical and psychological professionals are recognizing the healing power of telling your story. Psychologist James Pennebaker, M.D., has long been convinced that talking about life experiences can be “healing at deep levels.” In reviewing Pennebaker's book for *The New York Times*, Daniel Goleman wrote, “Dr. Pennebaker has demonstrated that expressing emotions appears to protect the body against damaging internal stress and seems to have long-term health benefits.”

Carolyn Myss, Ph.D., a renowned medical intuitive, believes that the way a person invests energy (thinking, feeling, speaking) in his or her past can either drain life force or provide more zest for life.

One of the personal biographies I wrote concerns a German woman who was very ill when her surgeon-son called me. “My mother has pancreatic cancer that has returned,” he said, “can you write her biography?”

When I first arrived on her doorstep, she greeted me with a skeptical expression. But during the following nine months as I interviewed this septuagenarian for her biography, she and I became close. She told me about events never before described, when, as a child in Eastern Europe during World War II, she was part of a kinder-transport. She shared her deep grief over life's losses, and together we celebrated her joys. When she read the draft of her biography, she gained perspective by seeing over-arching themes of wisdom and acceptance applied to the passages of her life. As it turned out, the book was printed after she died, but her memory lives on both in our hearts and in her personal biography book. For her, it was a chance to be heard, and a chance to tell her story her way.

The Pioneer Spirit Lives worth remembering

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In their wedding portrait, the young couple pose stiffly in their best—perhaps borrowed, clothes. Virgil, 20, stands lean and lank in a dark suit, vest, and black gloves. His right leg is forward and bent, and his ears are prominent beneath a black top hat. His bride's dark hair curls out from her bonnet. She is slender, wearing a long, white gown with puffed sleeves and a high collar. Within the year, Virgil had filed on a piece of land in Oklahoma, and Velma had delivered her first baby in a log cabin.

Winter hadn't yet given way to spring as the young couple hammered sideboards to their horse-drawn wagon and built an overhead frame. They painted a wagon sheet with linseed oil to waterproof it, and stretched it over top. Velma later described her covered wagon adventure to her daughter.

"We was off the last of March, 1899," she said. "I was 17, he was 20. I had a six-month old baby on the breast. It was snowing hard when I climbed into the wagon, looked back and waved at my mother. Many times later I remembered the look in her eyes and understood...but at the time, I didn't."



Our ancestors were thrifty, following Ben Franklin's motto that, "A penny saved is a penny earned." Necessities were always provided, but luxuries were rare. Many of them accepted no charity, but were always willing to help others in need.

Personal BIOGRAPHY



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*I write and publish books about families, businesses, and places, and give talks on "The Joy of Life Review."
I am honored to be a CarePartners hospice volunteer.*