



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL HISTORY

What is personal history?

Personal history is the preservation of a person's life story, memoirs, or life values in printed form or on audiotape, videotape, CD or DVD.

What is a personal historian?

A personal historian records and preserves people's memoirs and life stories.

What is the Association of Personal Historians?

The Association of Personal Historians, Inc. (APH) is a nonprofit professional organization supporting the work and skill development of many hundreds of professional personal historians throughout North America and around the world. Our members are dedicated to helping individuals and groups record and preserve their life stories, memoirs, and histories. APH members possess the skills to elicit, record, and preserve the life stories of individuals, families, organizations, businesses, and entire communities for posterity.

How does personal history differ from genealogy?

A personal historian records a person's life stories and experiences, whereas genealogists research and record a person's descent from his or her ancestors.

What's the purpose? Why would anyone be interested in my life story?

Every person's life is interesting. Wouldn't you like to know what your great-grandparents' lives were really like—in their own words? No matter how ordinary you might think your life is, it's extraordinary to your descendants and to future researchers. As Mark Twain said, *"There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is an impossibility. Inside the dullest exterior, there is a drama, a comedy, and a tragedy."*

If a personal historian interviews me, what if there are some things I don't want to talk about?

Leave them out. No one will force you to say anything. However, it sometimes helps to review painful periods and realize how you survived them. This can be especially valuable to future readers when they are going through dark times.

Where and how is the interview done? Is anyone else there?

The interviews are usually recorded at your home in a quiet, comfortable room. To avoid distractions, often it's a good idea for other family members to occupy themselves elsewhere. Even if two people, such as a married couple, are both being interviewed, better results are usually achieved by having separate interviews.

How long does it take to do the interviews?

Recording a person's life story can average from a few hours to 10 or 20 hours, depending on the narrator's memories and desire to share them. Sessions last from one to three hours each, depending on your energy and comfort, and are spread over days or weeks.

How long does it take to complete the project?

It varies according to the scope of the project. Interviews on audiotape can be completed in a matter of weeks (see above). To produce a video, CD or DVD, or to turn those audiotapes into a book may require six months or more to finish. It depends on how much material is involved and the amount of time you have available to spend on any aspect of the project.

What's the final product? How do I know which one to choose?

The result could be a set of audiotapes, a book, an ethical will, a film or videotape, a CD or a DVD. Each choice has its own benefits and price range. A personal historian can clarify which products might suit your needs. Locate several personal historians in your area in our Membership Directory, and ask them questions.

What is an ethical will?

An ethical will is a document written to your loved ones and provides a way to express your spiritual legacy, your values, hopes, life's lessons, forgiveness and love to your family, friends, and community. It may be written at a significant point in your life or as part of your estate plan.

What do I get from CDs and DVDs?

CDs and DVDs are computer disks on which you can store a lot of information digitally. Our professionals can help you tell your story in text, photos, audio, documents, and even film and video clips, all on one disk. Designed to give the computer user easy access, CDs and DVDs help you create a new form of storytelling that will be fresh in the eyes of future generations.

How much does a personal history cost?

Prices vary widely, depending upon the length of the interviews, the services you need and the end result you want. They may range from several hundred dollars to many thousands for a complex biography, a large family or company history, or an intricate video production. A personal history project can be crafted to fit your budget. Often

several family members who believe in the importance of preserving their family's legacy can share the cost.

What is the process for making a book about my life?

First, a personal historian will talk with you to develop an outline of what you want to cover, then record a series of interviews with you on audiotape. After transcribing your narrative, the material will be organized and edited, giving you a chance to review, change and approve each part. After photographs and other memorabilia are included, your manuscript will be laid out in book form, then printed and bound.

What will a book cost?

Book prices vary based on the following factors:

- The time it takes the person to tell his or her life story, which determines the time needed to transcribe the tapes;
- The time needed for editing and revisions;
- The number of photos and illustrations used and how many are in color;
- Whether a graphic artist is used to design the book;
- The printing and binding process and materials used;
- The number of books that are produced.

What are some advantages of creating a video?

Video captures the subject in action, telling his/her life story in his/her own voice, showing facial expressions and gestures. Future generations can see the people and objects that are most important to the subject, as well as his/her favorite places and activities. Video production can be simple or complex, depending on the client's desires. It may include music, sound effects, titles, opticals, or interviews with other family members. Search the Membership Directory for a videographer or filmmaker in your area and ask about your options.

What does a video project cost?

Video prices vary, depending on the following things:

- The number of hours of tape shot;
- The variety of locations and difficulty of set-ups (lighting, sound, etc.);
- The time needed to edit the tape and the soundtrack;
- The addition of voice-over, titles, special effects, music, sound effects, opticals, etc.;
- The number of copies made from the final cut.

Can I write my memoir myself?

Yes, you can, and there are many books and classes to help you do it. Yet most people never get around to doing it on their own. They need the motivation, structure, prompting, and encouragement that a professional personal historian can provide.

Where can I find good books on memoir writing?

Search the Internet or your local library for the key words: Family History, Writing Your Autobiography, Writing Your Memoirs, etc. You'll find many books available to help you. Some APH members have written very helpful books that you can find on our Web site.

Where can I find a good class to help me write my memoirs?

Your local adult education, community college, or university often offers writing classes to help you. You can also search the APH Membership Directory for gifted professionals in your vicinity who teach life story writing classes and workshops.

If I decide I need help, how do I choose the right personal historian for me?

Go to the APH Membership Directory and search for someone in your region. You'll find skilled, caring professionals with talent and expertise who live near you. Call a few and talk with them about what they can do for you. You'll get some good ideas and the information you learn will help you shape your own project.

www.personalhistorians.org