

ST. CHARLES SOUTH ELGIN Sun

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JOANI
FOSTER

Life stories

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Memoirs reveal family resemblances

What do you know about your great grandparents? Anything at all? If you do, chances are that it is very little.

Think about this; you, yourself, will probably be all but forgotten in just two generations. That is a key reason for writing everything down. It is not just about people but things as well. Like the cracked vase your Mom might have carefully repaired because her mother brought it over from Europe on a perilous journey across the sea. Worthless in and of itself, she had carefully glued it back together because it had been her own mother's parting gift to her. Without a written account by a family member, people and possessions are all but forgotten.

Would we like to know more about these relatives? What did they do for a living? How they cooked and what were their feelings about life, love, and perhaps God?

Memoirs are reflections, reminiscences, experiences, or even riotous adventures with the luxury of time to see the events from a long-range perspective. They are not the same as journaling. They are random, not a daily account-

ing and not chronological. They are moments that stand out over the space of time.

From the perspective of a few decades, choices and events in our lives might reflect genes, physical and emotional attributes passed along for generations. Examples of this might include: She was a born leader, troublemaker (everyone has one of those), beauty, generous soul, etc. just like grandma or aunt so and so. Someone will be interested in reading about them one day. It might well have been the carrot-top curly-head that showed up again two generations later.

This brings to mind my own cousins who were raised in the south while the rest of the clan lived in the north. We saw little of one another growing up. Now it's incredible how we look out over the horizon or hold our cutlery or have similar mannerisms that must be genetic. I notice this at every reunion. Something is passed that is definable.

But, how do any of us really go about doing this? Where do you begin? How will you ever find the time?

Well, there is a way to learn how to leave a life legacy, and Rosanne Gulisano can teach

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View from
St. Charles



you. She is the creator of Lifestories and presents a program of creating memoirs. Her workshops give you a reason to tell your stories and stay motivated. She recently gave a workshop at the Geneva Library, and double the usual number of registered patrons attended. I heard so many positive comments from the people who were there. I decided to interview her and see just how she got started doing this work.

I found Rosanne caring and passionate about helping others with everything she has found motivating and helpful to do the task. The kudos she received from students contained one key word, and that word was inspirational. It was exactly the way I found her to be. She has a way of inspiring you.

She designed a three-ring binder to help keep your writings together. It is a key com-

ponent to the task at hand as well as lots of hints. One student said that what helped her most was making a schedule and sticking to it, whether it's a few minutes or an hour each week.

When asked how long she had been doing this, she shared this story: She was living in Winnetka and joined a group of women who were working on memoir writing. Fifteen women met once a month and shared written stories of their own lives. They had fun as well as creating a unique legacy on paper for future generations. They became close in the process.

When relocating to St. Charles, she joined The Welcome Club and started a group there. The importance of these written memories became rally clear when her own aunt died in 2001. It was then she started teaching.

After the funeral her cousin sent an eight-page memoir, written by Aunt Alice herself, of highlights in her life. Included were stories of the old country, Belgium; her early Christmas memories; harrowing experiences as a refugee during World War I. The aunt

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recalled what it was like to be an immigrant in early 20th century America. The story even included Rosanne's own mother, Aunt Alice's younger sister.

Rosanne gives presentations to clubs and church groups and colleges. She sometimes does four- and six-week classes on the subject.

"Do you always tell the truth?" I asked. "Lots of fami-

lies have skeletons in their closets. Mine do."

"You can tell the truth but you don't have to tell it all," she said. "My motto is to have fun and to live, laugh and get it done."

Briefly, Prevention magazine reported that writing your life story might also boost your health. Writing about emotions is not only a healthy thing to do emotionally (it helps ease depression), but it is physically beneficial as well. There are studies that reveal improvement in body and mind.

There are new classes coming up soon, so contact Rosanne before they fill up. Her phone number is (630) 587-1929, fax is (630) 587-1930 and her e-mail is zortam@aol.com.

Don't let yourself be forgotten!

Joani Foster has lived in St. Charles since 1973. She welcomes story ideas about everyday heroes, interesting hobbies or professions. Contact her at JoaniFoster@yahoo.com