

# Do They Know...?

*Lana Rockwell*

As soon as my grandchildren made their appearance on this earth, I began to get “Grandparent” books. You know the type – the kind that asks for all kinds of your own personal information. For instance, “how old were you when I was born” or “where were you when I was born” or “what is your first memory of me”, etc. Now I was going to be the perfect “Grama” and fill out one of those books for each of my eight grandchildren, (their parents always made sure I had one for each new baby) but every time I picked up a pen and opened the book to begin that monumental task, the questions seemed too “cookie cutter” for me. There was so much more I wanted to share. For instance, “why I don’t like chocolate covered cherries” or “why I had a deathly fear of policemen until I was 16 years old”.

I don’t have any scientific evidence to back this up, (probably because I took only one psychology class in college) but I believe we are who we are today, because of what we have been through. In other words, we are “products of our past”. So, if our children and grandchildren ever wonder why I have a huge scar on my knee, or why I have a tender spot in my heart for young couples who have lost a child, they deserve to know; but where and how would I begin?

For many years, I made the statement that I couldn’t wait until I was 80, because it seemed to me that’s when people started remembering and talking about their childhoods. So what made me think I could pull enough out of the cobwebs of my brain to put a group of memories together? I only had a few incidents that I could recall at any given time. However, it’s been my philosophy for a long time that unless you get started on something you want done – whether it is losing weight, getting more education, etc. the only way to get it done is to get started. So with fear and trembling – after all, would anyone be interested in my stories? – I decided to write one memory every week and at the end of 52 weeks, I would bind them into a book and give them to my children and grandchildren for Christmas. I decided to start with my earliest memories assuming I would be writing well into my adulthood by the time I finished all 52 weeks. However, I was in for a delightful surprise. The more I wrote, the more I remembered. I kept a notepad beside the keyboard and as other memories popped into my head while I was writing about a specific event, I made a note of that new thought. Before long I had a list of 52 topics that only took me to age 10! WOW! This is going to be some project! I included as much detail as I could remember -- when, where, why and how the event occurred; what was going on in the family at the time of the event? What was the weather like, was it during a holiday, did we have company, who was involved and how long did it last? I tried to include anything that would help bring the event to life.

About half way through the first year, my excitement continued to build and I began to remember pictures I had seen (many of them still in old shoe boxes) that went along with the memories. So, I went to work looking for and finding several of them to include on the opposite page of that particular memory. I found many types of stationary that seemed to fit certain memories, so that made the book a little more interesting to look at and read instead of just plain white paper.

Of the four children my parents raised, I had two considerably older sisters and one younger brother. I knew they would not remember the same events the way I did. After all, if I was writing about something that took place when I was four, the sister who was 14 would have a

completely different version. I also knew they would each probably want to read my memories, so I needed to come up with a disclaimer. My disclaimer became – “you can read my memories as long as you don’t try to ‘fix’ them according to your own memories. If you want to put the record straight, you will need to write your own version”. They all agreed and it has been a joy to reminisce with them as they read my version and then talked about how they remembered the same event.

Word spreads quickly. There is a group of people in our 55PLUS ministry at Woodmen Valley Chapel in Colorado Springs who meet every Thursday morning. As soon as they heard what I was doing, they asked me to help them get started writing their own memories. Most of them are over 70 and what an honor it has been to encourage them to get their life stories written down for their families. We meet monthly and each of them is asked to bring one memory they have written during the last month. What an enriching time that has become! These people have lived through WWII, Vietnam and Desert Storm. Some of them remember when horse and buggy was the mode of transportation, not automobiles. Some of them are black skinned and lived through the Desegregation of the South. One of them moved from town to town as her sharecropper father tried to provide for all eight children after their mother died in childbirth. Given 5 pennies by an uncle (I believe she was 3 or 4 at the time), she planted and watered them every day hoping they would grow and multiply until, finally, her father finally told her pennies would not grow in the dirt. Another describes her childhood in Holland during the German occupation in WWII. Each of them has seen hardships, trials and struggles their families will never see.

When we first started meeting, several of them were not sure they wanted to tell the sad or harsh things they have been through for the fear of making their loved ones sad as they read. Of course, they can write what they wish, but I encouraged them to include those events because, if we only write about the good times, we are only sharing one side of what has made us what we have become. These “nuggets of gold” in our midst may be too shy or modest to stand in front of a group and tell their stories but they are writing them down and I have no doubt that the people who read them will be forever grateful that they took the time to share their lives in print. I am incredibly blessed to have played a part with their memory writing.

To my amazement, not only have my children and grandchildren loved the stories, but extended family and friends have all wanted a copy of the book. There is now a copy in Australia, one in Tennessee and one in Kansas along with many here in Colorado. I am certainly not a professional “writer”. I just want to share my life with my children and grandchildren. The days of sitting on a porch on a hot summer night and listening to Grama and Grampa tell stories are over. Not only is there not enough time for that any more, the attention span is not there – at least with my family. I’ve decided even if they don’t take the time to read the memories now, as they get older and have more time – especially when I’m no longer here – I know I will have left my story with them from which I pray they will gain strength through the hard times and be able to laugh through the good times.

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