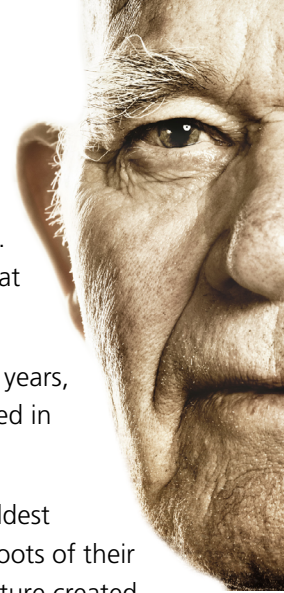


# PublishMe

How and why  
you should write  
your family's memoirs

[www.publishme.co.nz](http://www.publishme.co.nz)





Adopted children often experience intense feelings of loss at being divorced from their blood-line history. And yet those of us in blood-line families, are often blasé about remembering or recording the history that surrounds us.

In Maoridom, whakapapa was so important that the family tree was memorised going back hundreds of years, along with tales of heroic or interesting deeds and some personal detail. Visual cues were often embedded in the artworks of the village too.

But in the modern New Zealand family, records rarely extend back more than a generation beyond the oldest family member. Thousands of genealogists across New Zealand sift through official records seeking the roots of their family tree, but though they may trace births, deaths and marriages, rarely is there much detail in the picture created.

So often you hear people say, I wish I'd asked Mum or Dad more about their lives before they died. It is in those memories, that the real detail, the colour of history, resides.

Many museums are now actively recording oral histories of all sorts of people before they die; not famous people, but people who lived in New Zealand at different times, in different places and doing different things that contributed in some small way to creating the fabric of the country we know today. If such memories aren't recorded, much knowledge is irretrievably lost; knowledge that may be important to our future understanding of ourselves and our place here.

"Letting family histories die is almost like letting species become extinct," says Jane Beals, managing director of assisted self-publishing website, [www.publishme.co.nz](http://www.publishme.co.nz), who has personal experience of the value of family histories.

"My father's father left the family a memoir detailing his and my grandmother's life, arriving in New Zealand from England to minister in a remote parish in Raglan. The hardships the family endured, cut off in winter and serving seven small churches on horseback, are fascinating to read today.

"My father, who was three when they arrived in Raglan, left a memoir too, which played a central role at his recent funeral. He was such a mentor to the family and others, that I even produced a small memoir about his lovely funeral, collecting the speeches and expressions in the cards that everyone made, along with some family photographs that otherwise may not have been shared. The whole family and close friends have copies of both books. Even the young ones really enjoy reading them.

"I'm currently working with my mother to capture her memories on paper. We hope to start a family tradition that extends down the generations."

'New Zealand' rooms of most city libraries are delighted to have copies of local area memoirs. Legally, copies of all new books are to be deposited at the National Library to add to the nation's stock of research material. Today's memoirs may sit for a good few years, but later become invaluable sources of information.



"Some family histories may never make the libraries though," Mrs Beals says. "We recently assisted production of a beautiful family history in full colour, with an extensive family photo collection along with the family history. Two hundred copies were printed and posted to family who had ordered them from all over the world – some in hard cover and some in soft. But we were not allowed to read it or to keep copies," says Jane. "Apparently there were family secrets that were to stay strictly within the family. But at least they got recorded, and who knows? In 50-60 years when whatever was so sensitive becomes less so, one of those books may be very useful for research.



. . . don't put it off for too long - too long quickly becomes too late.

"Letting family histories die is almost like letting species become extinct," says Giles Scott.

"We are such a young, small nation, if we don't take responsibility for our history-keeping at a personal level, we'll never afford to do it fully at the national level."

So if you are reading this and have now made the decision to write your family memoirs, how would Jane suggest you go about it?

For a start, she suggests you don't put it off for too long - too long quickly becomes too late - and that you try to develop a regular routine. If it is your own memoirs you are writing, then find a small time each day to write, perhaps taking the weekend off. If you are recording the memoirs of someone else, recording a small section each time you visit with the person makes it easier, especially if they are old and prone to getting tired easily.

Purchase a small microphone that can be mounted close to the mouth, then just chat. Transcribe and edit later. The chat can be recorded straight into a computer if you want to, or a small tape recorder, dictaphone or even some cellphones.

Memoirs don't have to be done in chronological sequence either, though that is fine if it is easiest.

One alternative, for example, is to make each chapter, or conversation, topic-based. For example, topics may include; hobbies and interests, love and family, the wider family, friends and mentors, known history of the family, things I treasure in my house and why I treasure them, childhood, teen years, schooling and learning, work and play, beliefs and wisdom, hopes and dreams, my favourite family photos and the memories they set off for me, my proudest achievements, my worst moments, how we did things, our houses, holidays and travel – even a section for best recipes, poems, photographs, paintings, handwork, gardens or whatever creative expression characterised the person. There is no one-size-fits-all recipe, but the most important thing is to make a start. Family histories like memoirs probably aren't going to be sold in bookstores, so you can just relax and let them flow. The family will make any allowances that need to be made.

With modern digital printing and bookbinding technology, you can have a memoir turned into just a single book if you want. The old days of having to print hundreds have gone. You just print as many as there are family who want them. In fact you can get all the help you want along the way too, even getting a recorded memoir written from the recording if you wish. All the support people to help are available through [www.publishme.co.nz](http://www.publishme.co.nz).

So what is there to wait for? Make this the year you write your memoir or family history!

