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# FAMILY HISTORY

## *Whispers and Memories*

The mother in this picture turns 100 this month. Her name is Agnes Strudwick Bustard. It used to be Agnes Baird Strudwick. At least that is what she called herself—Baird was her mother's maiden name, and she took it as a middle name because she hadn't been given one. Agnes has traveled around the world, has taught people about Jesus from colleges in big American cities to dirt-floored rooms in India. But if you ask Agnes's great-granddaughter about her, you'll learn that, when she was particularly pleased with a meal she had served her family that was being eaten without any words of thanks or praise, she was in the habit of complimenting herself outloud, saying, "Yes Agnes, this is a very good meal."

Isn't it odd that *that* story is the one thing for a girl to know about her great-grandmother—a woman who has lived 100 years and worked hard for God around the world? But that is the thing about oral history—you rarely can control

what gets passed down from one generation to another or the veracity of the information. Oral history is considered by some historians to be an unreliable source for the study of history. However, other historians consider it to be a valid means for preserving and transmitting history. Experience within literate cultures indicates that each time anyone reconstructs a memory, there are changes in the memory, but the core of the story is usually retained. Over time, however, minor changes can accumulate until the story becomes unrecognizable. To see how this happens, play a few rounds of "Whisper Down the Lane" with your family over dessert.

Try to remember what you received for Christmas over the last few years. It is hard to recall, isn't it? Imagine how hard it is to remember a family's history. A good thing to do at family gatherings is to collect the oral histories of your relatives and write them down so they won't be forgotten or mangled. Following are some tools to get you started in collecting and preserving your history.



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# FAMILY HISTORY

## *Mini-Memoir*

To get into practice for recording family history, you can begin with a mini-memoir. A memoir is a piece of autobiographical writing, usually shorter than an autobiography. The memoir, especially as it is being used in publishing today, often tries to capture certain highlights or meaningful moments in one's past, often including a contemplation of the meaning of that event at the time of the writing of the memoir. They are full length books, but the scope of time is brief compared to an entire life and all the events of that life. You might feel like no one would ever want to read about you, but this is not true. If you write your memoirs well, they might become a family heirloom.

Use the next page to write out your mini-memoir. Draw a picture from the event in the old photo frame. Remember, a memoir focuses on a limited time period, place or event, and maintains a first person point of view.

## *Brainstorming*

List events in your life you would like to write a short account about.

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## *Getting Picky*

After selecting an event from the list above, list details about the event: people, weather, time of year, objects important in the event, smells, sounds, and yucky parts.

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## *Organize the Event*

Rearrange the details above to make sense and to give your story order and flow.

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# FAMILY HISTORY

## *Mini-Memoir*

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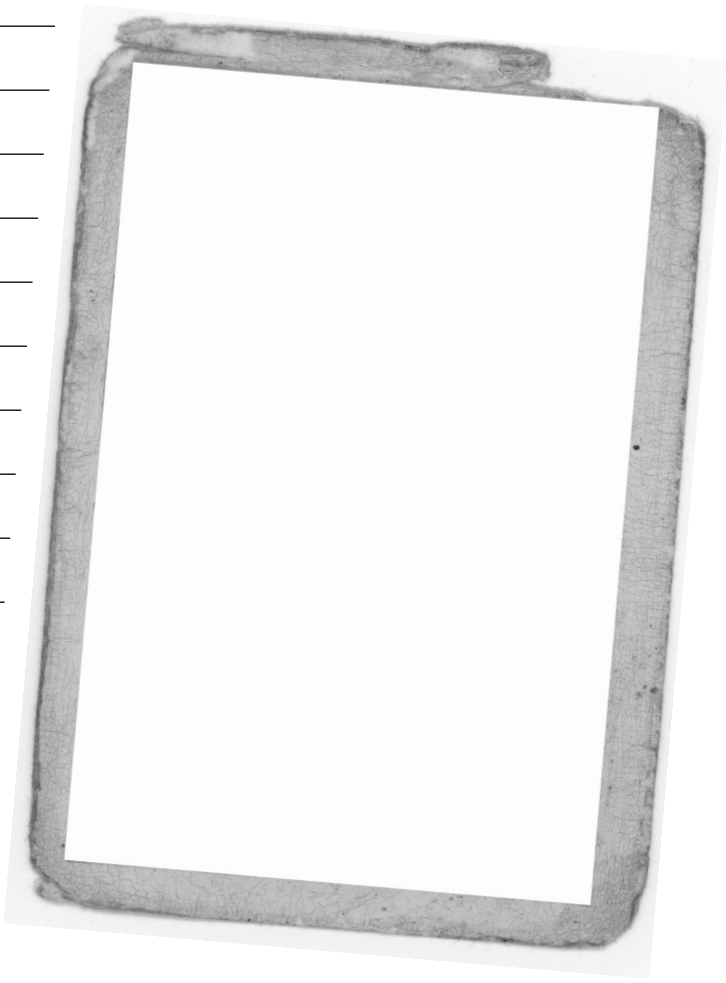
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# FAMILY HISTORY

## *Writing Home Movies*

Now that you have practiced writing down some history—specifically your family’s history and even more specifically, *your* part in that history—it is time to preserve some history from your extended family. After the barbeque, before your mother gets out the dessert, take out a pad of paper and pen and quiz a family member for interesting things in their history or stories from the family’s collective history. There are fascinating stories in even the most ordinary lives, and all we have to do is find them and bring them to the page. Using colorful language and developing lush stories is all we need to do to keep our memoirs from becoming a boring history lesson. Keep in mind that what you write are like home movies: if you don’t make it interesting to readers that don’t know you, they most likely won’t be much more interesting to those who do.

*Following are some questions to ask. The more questions you add to this list, the better your family history will be.*

What is your full name?

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When were you born and where?

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Where do you live and who do you live with?

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Why were you given the name you have?

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Have you ever had a nickname? Where did you get it?

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How would you describe your family growing up?

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Where did our family come from?

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How long has our family been in America?

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# FAMILY HISTORY

## *Writing Home Movies*

Who is our most memorable ancestor?

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What did they do?

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Who is our most infamous ancestor?

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What did they do?

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What is our family's spiritual history? What did our ancestors believe?

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Follow-up questions:

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