

Hold history

Alison Rourke traded in a career interviewing prime ministers, presidents and CEOs to come home and record personal histories for families to cherish. She told her story to **Jessica Goulburn**.

Lisa Upton and I both had careers in international journalism and we spent a lot of time abroad covering war zones before we started Storylines. When we came back to Australia a few years ago with young families, we wanted to find a way that we could still use those journalism skills in a really meaningful way.

When we were working internationally, we'd interview hundreds of people including presidents, prime ministers and CEOs. But so often, it's the personal stories that last with us. Storylines records people's memories. Our tagline is 'memories on record' and they're personal stories for families, rather than for publication.

People say: "Oh gosh, is my story interesting enough?" Everybody has an extraordinary story. It's part of their family's jigsaw and if some of it is missing then the jigsaw is not complete.

We interview the person, write their stories in first person and publish beautiful coffee-table books with photos. We also occasionally do audio CDs and films. There is always information that comes out that is extraordinary to the family. We've had the training to stand back and manage the process delicately, allowing the interviewee to say as much as they want to say and really be able to pass that story on.

It's also the 'stranger in the lift' phenomenon; we aren't clouded by preconceived notions of the person's life, or snippets of stories we have heard before. If you're interviewing your own family there's an emotional dynamic.

Sometimes people don't know where to start. We send out questionnaires before our interviews and we give people plenty of guidance about the sorts of things that they might like to think about. Some people choose to focus on a specific time and others want to go right back to their childhood.

Ultimately when people commission something from us, it's their project; they're the editors-in-chief. We bring guidance. We're actually doing all the work and they're enjoying themselves and maybe having a cup of tea at the same time.

Family stories are just as rewarding as any story you would work on in the international arena. It's a legacy for future generations so in 100 years' time when family members look back, they can say 'oh that's where I came from'. ••

Alison and Lisa are available to talk to local Probus Clubs about how to get started recording personal histories.
W: www.storylines.net.au
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