Recording Life Stories

Everything You Need To Start Record, Edit and Publish Your Life Story

The Free e-Book

By

Ian Kath
CreateYourLifeStory.com
CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Motivation 1

Biographical Styles 2

What is an Audio Life Story? 3
  It's a conversation
  Benefit of Audio

When is it too late?. 4

Where do I start? 4

Producing a Life Story 6

Equipment 6
  Microphones
  Computers
  Interface
  Portable recorders
  Software

Production 8
  Recording Environment
  Recording
  Self Recording
  Story Telling
  Prompts
  Imaginings
# Two Person Conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outsiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backing up recordings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Editing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Installed Software</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-Line Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsourced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing Style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Publishing

### Digital Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hosted Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Hosted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Physical Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photo Books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Archiving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deterioration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Things to do first

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anything is Better than Nothing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality, it’s up to You</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Summary

## Conclusion
Introduction

Welcome to *Recording Life Stories*. This guide is designed to assist you to gain the knowledge to start gathering information and resources to record someone’s Life Story. The system laid out in this guide, if you choose to utilise it is the most powerful way of sharing that story with the world.

Since 2007 I’ve been producing an online chat show, *Your Story*, as a podcast, where I’ve had the good fortune to sit and converse with scores of people about their lives. Meeting these wonderful people, then recording and publishing their conversations in the public arena, has been some of the most satisfying and enlightening experiences of my life. These conversations, and what has come from them, are the basis behind *Create Your Life Story* and this guide.

Following on from *Your Story*, I have also had the pleasure to sit with a select few and converse while recording their Life Story as a much longer audio form to *Your Story*. These conversations are where people speak in detail about their life experiences, successes and heartaches. These stories are primarily produced as historical biographies of an individual’s life and intended for whoever may be interested, mainly family. However, with online publication it’s now possible for anyone, using the power of search, to find tit-bits of information from people who have had direct experiences with various subjects of interest in their research.

Throughout the development of these oral histories I’ve been discovering the joy and secrets of how to best converse, record and publish an individual’s Life Story.

Do you want to record someone else, or even record yourself? If so, with the information in this guide you’ll be able to gain the knowledge needed to collect and publish content in a form that best suits you. Additionally, you can make these recorded stories available for family or the greater community to share.

Motivation

Have you ever said, or heard someone say, “I’ve spent all these years learning to do _____ and when I die this knowledge will go with me, what a waste”? 

We all have experiences accrued during our lives. We all amass various knowledge, skills and abilities. If we do nothing to pass these attributes on they all vaporise with us when we go.

By taking the time to sit in conversation and record a Life Story we have captured a persons memories forever. These stories can include technical skills or life experiences of bygone days that others may never otherwise hear. Once captured it’s still possible to relive these moments through these recordings, heard in their own voice as if they were still here.
Have you ever seen a photo, video or text from your past then suddenly realised you had completely forgotten that experience? We all put memories away in the “archives of our mind” never to be thought of again. It can often take some mechanism, like a photo or question to recover them. How much more effective would it be to have recorded those memories whilst still fresh in our minds? Imagine capturing them in a way that expresses the emotions of the experience, then having a way to jog the memories back into the present.

Remember when people used journals and diaries to help access these distant memories? Now we have simpler and easier systems to record this information and, more importantly, share that information with those who care. To give you an idea of these points here is some audio I recorded that immediately takes me back to my time in Buenos Aires. Without it I would have forgotten what it was like to walk those streets at night.

For the first time in history a person’s Life Story can be recorded with easy-to-use, cost effective digital recording equipment. Using these devices we can now recorder, throughout a person’s lifetime and build a long chronology of their experiences. Imagine (if someone was dedicated) a person’s story could literally be recorded and kept from the cradle to the grave.

**Biographical Styles**

Traditionally, autobiographies as we know them have been text based in the form of books. As a matter of fact, biographies have always been one of the most popular publishing genres. Traditionally when someone considers a method of capturing a Life Story, text is the default that is considered. However today we are fortunate to have more options.

The earliest permanent records in human history are images painted on cave walls. Image recording eventually evolved into photography and video. These mediums today enable many people to have images that can be utilised in a Life Story to tell their personal history.

The original form of communicating a Life Story has always been through verbal (oral) history. The tradition of simple, but powerful, story telling has existed throughout the ages. This can now be combined with modern digital audio recording equipment to capture the story telling as a means of recording a Life Story - creating a new style of biography.

Unlike the past, we no longer have to use only one system to capture memories and stories. We can now utilise numerous modern technological systems to record, edit and publish in a format that best expresses the relevant aspects of a Life Story. A modern, 21st century biography can include text, images, video and audio, enabling us to flush out the whole story of an individual’s life.
The most powerful and easiest method of capturing a Life Story for the average person (as well as being a natural place to start) is with the single means of communication that we have always engaged in - Conversation.

Audio has the following advantages:

- Conversation is natural
- It Captures the individual’s personality
- Story telling has always engaged others
- Audio equipment is cost effective
- Editing, if necessary, is simple
- Sharing is simple
- Listening is easy and engaging
- Archiving is simple and cost effective

Once the process of starting to record a Life Story commences it seems to take on a life of its own. As stories are being recorded they start to flow and memories and inspiration appear. Photos / videos come out and personal thoughts are written down. This exciting progression creates a full, complete and whole Life Story that, when combined, is far more powerful than the sum of the individual parts.

**What is an Audio Life Story?**

We have all heard, and been drawn into, the conversational stories of someone’s life as they speak with passion and conviction of an experience from their past. An audio Life Story is about capturing the stories of someone’s life so they can be maintained for others to listen to as a form of history.

**It’s a conversation**

This is not new, it’s not scary, it’s what you know. An audio Life Story is just a recording of someone talking of their life and experiences – a simple conversation. It can be recorded by the person individually as though they were telling family and friend’s about their life or it can be a recorded in conversation between two people primarily focused on the person who is the subject of the recording. Either way, a Life Story is a person’s recollection of their experiences told in stories and conversations so as to express the various individual elements of their life with emotion.
Benefit of audio

The strength of recording an audio Life Story is in its ability to capture the person’s individual character in ways not possible with text or images. As stories are told subtle verbal nuances add to the depth of the emotions behind the facts. The result, is a story with the additional of their verbal style, helping to add to our ability to see life through their eyes. This is a permanent record, a snapshot of how they see their life with all their emotions mixed with experiences. It’s this emotion that makes these stories incredibly powerful.

When is it too late?

There’s the old saying that “if you’re breathing it’s never too late”. However, there are times when it is all but too late. These are the later stages where, due to illness or circumstances, someone has lost their ability to remember or communicate. There are also times when the emotional strain of the reflection process could be too much. Fortunately, these times are rare but there are often times when our memories fade, also making it too late - the story is lost.

On a more cheerful note, even in extreme circumstances a short recording of just a few minutes could possibly still be made. A small memento is better than none at all and would still be something to be cherished.

Where Do I Start?

That’s the most important single thing to do - Start!

Too often creating a Life Story is one of those projects that we will get around to “one day”, and then one day it’s too late. The exciting thing is that even when this project is finished it still isn’t complete until the life is complete. Therefore, it makes total sense not to think of finishing but starting. Just getting started is the most important thing. Everything after that just happens as part of the process and the story need never stop being produced. If only a little amount is captured before time runs out, so be it. At least there is something to hold onto.

To capture a Life Story the only thing that’s required to get started is a recorder. Once you have that you will be under way to start recording stories.

Don’t have a recorder? In reality, you probably do, you just don’t think of them that way. Suggestions for various recorders are included on Page 7. Actually, lots of great suggestions are included later on for you to check out, but don’t go away just yet as we have more ideas for you first.

If you have a recorder try it out - experiment and see how you feel. Here are some ideas to help you get your thoughts in order. You may like to get a feel for this project by recording a story about (say) your favorite childhood toy. Just start.
talking as though you were talking to a friend. Start with these words, “When I was a child living in _____, my favorite toy was a _____. I got it from _____ for _____”

If you don’t have a recorder begin by writing down a dozen things that you would like to talk about. These will get you reminiscing. It’s amazing how other stories will spill from these ideas to create new ideas. This is simply to get you started with the concept of creating a Life Story and will give you something to practice while you find a way of recording the audio.

If you want to record someone else contact them and mention that this is a project you want to do and would like to start planning for. Ask them to write a list of their life memories. There are a few ideas under the heading of Prompts on page 10 in this guide to help you with that.
Producing a Life Story

As with most things in life the production of anything with value is a multi staged process. In the case of producing an oral Life Story we need to prepare the equipment and content overview. Then record the conversations and edit into an interesting form for listening, followed by publishing so as to share this unique biography with those who are interested.

While most people may find the preparation and technical aspects of producing a Life Story challenging to varying degrees, the act of recording creates a level of anxiety in most people, more due to the unfamiliarity of the process. It’s best to all but disregard that a recording will be made. The act of recording should be thought of as nothing more than the capturing of a conversation of stories. All you are doing is what you have always done, have a conversation, it’s just that this time it won’t be lost once it’s said.

**Equipment**

As with all methods of recording stories we need some equipment. At it’s most basic text needs a pencil and paper, images need a camera and audio needs a recorder. The recorder consists of a few components but often they are all combined to make life simple and can be as easy to use as a modern point and shoot camera.

Lets look at each of the components, starting with the conversation and how they combine to make the process work.

**Microphones**

Microphones are where the sound starts it’s journey with our voice, which as an analog sound source is picked up. There are several general types of microphones but for our purposes they are:

- **Built in** microphones are combined with a computer or audio recorder. This makes the interface between the microphone and device invisible as they are all in one package.

- **Lapel/Lavalier** Microphones give the convenience of moving with the speaker and allow relaxed conversation as there is no need to consider the microphone which is quickly forgotten.

- **Desk mounted** microphones record the highest quality sound but require the greatest setup to connect it with the recorder.
Audio Interface

To connect a microphone to the computer it is necessary to use a piece of hardware known as an interface to convert the analog signal from the microphone (and mixer if microphone is processed) to a digital signal that the computer is able to understand. Some desk microphones with a USB connection connect directly to the computer with a built-in interface. All digital recorders have an internal interface to convert the audio from the built-in microphones.

Powered microphones can simply plug into the line-in of recorders and computers which then convert the signal to digital internally.

Computers

A computer with the appropriate software and microphone is a high quality recorder all ready set up to be utilised as your audio recorder.

The computer is also where all the editing and conversion of completed audio files will be performed. Chances are as you downloaded and are most probably reading this on a computer you are only a couple of short steps from being fully set up to start recording now.

As we are only dealing with digital recording, editing and publishing we will not be concerned with older analog systems. If you have audio recorded on tape it will be necessary to convert the recordings to digital and import them into a computer for the purposes of this guide.

Portable Recorders

The convenience of being able to travel and sit with someone for a conversation while recording is the greatest advantage of portable recorders. Now reasonably priced and of professional quality, a portable recorder can be simply left on a table to pick up the surrounding conversation with the built-in microphones or have alternative microphones/mixers plugged in, to record more specifically an individual. They connect and transfer files with ease and can be used as an interface directly into the computer.

Portable recorders are discreet and when used, particularly with lapel microphones, are very easily disregarded, allowing everyone’s attention to be directed onto the conversation.

You may already have a very capable portable recorder in your MP3 player or mobile phone. It could be well worth your while to take the time to understand the
use of these devices and the quality of the recordings that they can achieve before
you consider purchasing a single purpose portable audio recorder as often the
standards are well within the requirements for recording a conversation. Then you
can be underway with this project today.

Software

The audio editing software is used to record the direct audio input from the
microphone or audio that is transferred from a portable recorder or other sources.
They all need to be installed on your personal computer and are available from
several sources.

- Bundled software.
- Freeware/open source software.
- Purchased software.

The software is where at a minimum the audio is recorded then exported as a
completed file suitable for sharing and archiving.

It is also where your creative juices can flow. This is where you can edit, remove,
replace and rearrange the audio that has been recorded. Where audio can be
enhanced, effects and music added, all to complete and enrich the listening
experience of someone’s Life Story.

All this is now easily possible and within the reach of us with the power of digital
recording and processing.

Production

This is the process of assembling the audio components recorded either of yourself
or of someone else that will eventually become the completed audio Life Story.
There are several important and specific things to keep in mind to enrich the
process of story telling and enhance the finished recording.

Recording Environment

The physical environment where the recording is conducted can have a significant
impact on the quality of the final audio. There are some important points regarding
this recording environment that should be considered.

- Ambient sounds around the conversation should be in harmony with the
  individuals and purpose of the recording. The sound of birdsong in the
distance can add significantly but the noise of a construction site can
distract. If recording externally find somewhere quiet away from the noise of
civilization. If recording internally avoid noisy appliances like televisions and
air-conditioning units grinding away in the background. By monitoring the
audio through a set of headphones you can hear how the recording will
sound, bypassing the mental filters that our brain is so good at using to hide background noise.

- Comfort within the environment is vital as we are creating a conversational atmosphere where we want to relax, start chatting and tell stories. I encourage the casualness of having a cup of tea, coffee or something stronger as many a great yarn has been spun over a drink or meal. I’ll even go so far as to say, the sound of someone casually sipping on their drink while telling a story often adds to the atmosphere (just don’t over do it). A good measure of the level of comfort is, if at times where appropriate a good belly laugh is had you know that everyone is comfortable with the environment.

- Within the dialogue of the conversation add descriptions of the environment, not just the necessary place and date but also the enjoyment of the coffee and cake along with the weather that day. Mention if appropriate when someone enters the room and remember to describe how far apart the hands are held when telling the story of the fish that was caught.

**Self Recording**

Recording yourself has the advantage of being able to be done spasmodically when the moment is right. You could be walking down the street when you remember a story from the past, you whip out your recorder and grab the moment while you feel inspired. If you are someone who likes to prepare beforehand you can sit and consider the points you wish to make, write out some speaking points then sit down and start recording, giving you a sense of order and control over the process.

The challenge with self recording is in creating an engaging, story telling speaking style without the assistance of another person as a foil in the conversation. The importance of taking the time to construct a story around the points you wish to make is paramount. The easiest and simplest method of building a story is to personalise it. Every instance should be placed in the first person (even when talking of what someone else told you). Talk of the experiences that you remember by starting the subject with phrases like, “I remember…” or “there was this time when we…” or “my ______ said to me that…”.

A self recorded life story should remain conversation and never become a lecture or dictation. Unless you’re a talented writer and speaker don’t script and speak to the script as the audio will often be stilted and unnatural. It’s far better to have a list of bullet points as prompts, then just start telling stories. Although the recording may be in isolation, if it is conversational with the perceived listener both the recording and listening will be as engaging as a true two way conversation.
**Storytelling**

Autobiography, biography, history, memories or reminiscences it doesn’t matter what you care to call them, the essence is the same in that what we are talking of is storytelling, the ageless human communication of sharing information in story form.

In this case the stories are personal and in the first person. They are about you, your experiences and the information that others have shared with you. This is not about dry, cold lifeless facts, leave that for the academics, this is personal and reflective. This is about your experiences and emotions and no one has the right to tell you how it is different to how you experienced and remember it.

When you reflect on the past, you remember it as a story in your mind, you can see it and feel it in you. Storytelling is simply describing verbally what you see and feel.

**Prompts**

In any conversation or your own thought process, story points constantly throw up new ideas that are prompts for the next subject in the thinking or discussion. Within a conversation those evolving prompts lead continually to new ideas that maintain a conversation in a harmoniously linking way that is both natural and engaging. There are times though where the subject may come to a natural end and then it’s time to externally prompt.

In a two person conversation this is where the other person can move onto the next point of interest with a statement or question. If recording by yourself that next point has to be self generated. This is where a list of prompts is handy to help maintain the flow, stay on track and reinvigorate the conversation.

Here is a very short list of possible prompts and conversation points.

- Photos
- Documents: Birth, marriage, death, souvenirs, awards, trophies, prison release forms
- Family history
- Family name
- Heritage and migration
- Grandparents
- Family characteristics
- History when born
- Earliest memories
- Childhood home
- Stories of siblings
- Achievements
- School, sport and other activities
- Pets and animals
- First car
• Relationships with parents and siblings
• Higher education
• Relationships
• Work, training & career
• Marriage and children
• Home life
• Holidays and adventures
• Achievements
• Grandchildren
• Community
• Accidents and illnesses
• Unfinished things
• Most difficult challenge
• Advice to young people
• Time over again
• The best times
• Life now

If you are recording someone else these prompts could be as questions or statements. They could reference to a previous point or a new point that wishes to be made.

If self recorded these prompts should be mentally twisted to remember and draw out the story of an experience.

For example: “First day at school”. Is a dry statement that encourages a clinical response reciting facts only.

Whereas: “At 5 years of age I was so excited to finally be going to school…”

Imaginings

To draw out those memories into a form that can be shared as a story we simply need to go through a few simple steps. We do this all the time, this is just a reminder of what you already know and do.

• Prompt to a new subject.
• Remember a relevant time and occasion.
• Imagine the situation based on those memories.
• Feel the emotions of the time and experience.
• Describe what you see and feel in your mind

We are now in a state of remembering and imagining. With those imaginings in our mind we can let the stories flow in a natural and descriptive way.
Two person conversation

Conversations where two or more people are involved create a dynamic where the possibilities of new and interesting things can evolve. When others are involved, questions are asked that can take the conversation down paths that develop the richness of interests that are not necessarily obvious to the person, as they are drawn out to explain in more detail the stories that often develop in ways that they may not have considered worthwhile. They also have the advantage of keeping the conversation on track and move on from indulgent chatter about things that are irrelevant.

The dual conversation is the preferred and most stimulating method to develop the dynamic of great storytelling, by drawing someone out, especially if they are not used to telling their story.

Family Members

Family members conversing with the person who is being recorded have the advantage of being familiar with the general background story and other family members. They can talk of the many aspects of the person’s history as they already know the outline of their life and link readily from one subject to another as they already know the connections.

The disadvantage is the same as the advantages. Family members already know many of the stories and could disregard the significance of them to others. They can be so familiar with the existing links to other facts that they are unable to see additional possible connections that could reveal a new insight. Family members can also bring the baggage that often comes with having spent a lifetime together.

If possible a great middle ground for assistance, is someone who is family, knows the general lay of the land so to speak but is not intimately involved on all emotional levels. Ideally someone could be one who has married into the family or is a second or more distant relation, like a grandchild, nephew/niece or very long term family friend.

Outsiders

Coming with no connection to the person being recorded has the major advantage of being completely new to all the stories that are being told. With a genuine interest in the person it’s easy to be fascinated with the stories being told. This encourages more animated storytelling as the conversation reflects that interest and the pleasure of having someone now interested in what is being said. It’s much easier to show real interest and engagement if you haven’t heard the story or jokes before.

Outsiders, due to their lack of emotional connection can easily ask questions that family would never consider or have the blind innocence to explore, revealing answers that family members often have never heard.
The challenge is in knowing the points of interest to direct the conversation. This is where an overview of a person’s life is valuable rather than only relying on a long laundry list of prompts that are just systematically worked through. Spending just a few minutes to get a 30,000 foot view of someone’s life before you start is a great way to then link prompts together in a way that makes sense within the whole story of their life.

The outsiders point of view is where many listeners will be coming from so having an exterior view on the subjects and stories being told will relate to them.

**Style of Conversation**

The method of conversing about a Life Story can be in two styles.

- Chronological
- Thematically

The natural process of reminiscing on a Life Story is to start at the beginning and move chronologically to the present.

That may make sense in theory but the reality is that once a conversation is started it tends to then wander from stepping forward through the years to reversing backward, then from subject to subject.

If the conversation is kept rigidly chronological it will lose the flow of the stories as they evolve over the decades. If however the subject dominates it can change as new prompts take the conversation in various new directions, sometimes multiple directions at once. Occasionally a conversation can be so scattered that it is like herding cats with the subjects wandering all over the timeline until there is only confusion. This is where the discipline of staying on subject is relevant so as to maintain some sense of order.

The ideal is to stay generally in a chronological order but allow a story to evolve independent of the timeline until completion, then return to where the timeline was left off. These story evolutions can be both forwards or backwards chronological as a subject of conversation may need some additional background that requires reflection from further back in their history before it moves forward again.

As with all oral history the importance is to engage the person and listener while gathering the facts. Allowing the person to naturally evolve these stories in their style with gentle direction, will result in the best conversational style to suit them.

**Backing up recordings**

Once the conversations have been recorded it is imperative that additional back ups are made to ensure against possible loss or corruption. It would be tragic to go to all this effort to then lose the recordings just because an additional copy was not made. Mistakes and disasters do happen.
I’ve included backing up here as the recording is not completed with just the conversation. It’s finished when a back up is complete.

Back ups can be made on:

- CD/DVD.
- Flash memory.
- External hard drive.
- Uploaded to off site back up services.

These are the most common systems available today for backing up data. Don't even consider this, just do it as a necessity. The first thing I do on completion of a recording is make at least one copy, often two or more on different systems. Eventually after all the post production is complete and the finished audio is published I then archive a single copy of the original audio for future reference if it is ever required.

**Editing**

Once the audio is recorded the most critical part of this whole process is complete. Now if something happens at least the conversations have been captured for perpetuity.

If your idea of producing an audio Life Story was simply to gather the stories then the project is complete. However if you want to make the listening of these stories a pleasurable experience, some post production and editing is required. Even the most professional and experienced person will make some errors and in our case it’s amazing the difference a little tiding up can do.

To enable the editing of the recording it needs to be imported into the audio editing software and manipulated on your computer.

Audio editing software is available in several forms.

**Installed Software**

Some computer manufacturers supply installed and bundled audio software as part of purchasing a computer. Apple’s Garageband is a great editor in the iLife suite of programs. The latest version of iLife is bundled with all new Apple computers and is upgraded every couple of years.

Audio editing software is normally included with digital audio recorders.
as part of the purchase and can be installed on your computer.

There are several open sourced freeware programs available to be installed on your computer, the most common and well regarded programme available for both PC and Mac is **Audacity**. It can be downloaded to your computer and the programme is relatively simple.

Purchased software is available from novice to professional standards and are designed for music recording which requires far more bells and whistles than is needed for the editing and enhancing of a voice recording. Often the purchase price will reflect these extras that are unnecessary for our requirements.

My recommendation is if you are using an Mac use the installed Garageband or Audacity and if you are on a PC use Audacity or the software that is supplied with your portable audio recorder. These programs are more than you will need.

**On-Line Programs**

An online audio editor that is used through a web browser that may be useful for some people it is available at **Myna**

**Outsourced**

If you feel that the editing of the recording is beyond your skills, sending it to a professional audio editor with instructions and examples of what you would like to achieve is an alternative.

**Editing Style**

This is an individual preference but what I have found advantageous is to clean up the audio but not to de-humanise it. Our natural conversational style has some lumps and bumps in the dialogue and it’s important to maintain an element of those to keep it as a real natural conversation.

Editing can include some or all of the following.

- Removal of stammers, stutters, umms and arghs.
- Removal of extraneous sounds both from the person and the surrounding environment.
- Removal of long pauses.
• Enhance and clean up the recording with effects and equalisation.

• Rearrange segments of audio to maintain context either chronological or thematically.

• Addition of sound effects to enhance the subject being discussed.

• Addition of music to lead in and lead out a subject, period or episode.

• Addition of music or effects (stinger) to change the subject abruptly.

• Voice over from additional people.

• Adjust the volume (normalise) of all audio components to enable a pleasurable listening experience.

The final phase of editing is the mix-down where the audio is blended by the software programme and formatted into the style that you require. For ease of distribution this is normally as an MP3 file which can be saved in varying quality standards for physical distribution or transmission over the internet.

The final phase of editing is the addition of ID3 tags or metadata. These include the title, name, author, publisher, date, description, etc. It can also include some images as album art. An easy programme for inserting metadata is iTunes.

At present searching audio is only possible through the metadata which necessitates the need for detail tagging and descriptions in order for search engines to identify what the audio is actually about. Along with other systems of attaching data to where the audio is placed it’s important to consider the information that will be associated with it in the metadata.
Publishing

Once the recording is edited, mixed and tagged it’s ready to be shared.

This is where it’s necessary to consider how others will access the audio and what playback system the audio will need to be transferred to.

The possibilities are:

- Online digital files.
- Digital physical copies.
- Analog physical copies.

Digital Distribution

The great advantage of online digital versions is the files can be accessed remotely by others without the physical need for a copy. If the digital files are included with other biographical materials such as text, photographs and video it is possible to create a whole new level of experience of someone’s Life Story.

Publishing online also enables the power of search. Others researching specifics that could be mentioned on the site can discover additional information that has never been known of previously, educating beyond just family and friends.

Hosted Sites

Several easy to use hosted blogging sites are an ideal mechanism for publishing online. Once all the information has been uploaded and the site is configured it will exist permanently without any maintenance on your part as it is fully hosted. There are several free services including WordPress, Blogger, TypePad amongst others.

As you are relying on these companies to maintained the site and service permanently, in the slim chance of them choosing to shut down the service on some future date it’s prudent to ensure that a copy of the site and all files is archived, to be uploaded elsewhere if necessary.

Personal Hosted

With a personally hosted site there is complete control over all aspects of the site including style and content. This could be particularly relevant if you wish to have the content online but have a desire to restrict access to the information.

However with this level of control continual maintenance will be require including permanent costs and updates as an ongoing concern. Self hosting a site would never be a set and forget situation.
Privacy

If privacy is of utmost concern, physical publishing is the best way to control the content as you maintain complete control over the data and information. Once data is uploaded anywhere on the internet, as slim as the chance may be, it is now somewhere else and could be compromised.

If however, just a moderate level of privacy is required all the blogging sites can be configured to require passwords or direct web addresses (URL's) to access the information.

It is even possible to post date the publication of specific information if that is a requirement.

Physical Distribution

Although the internet is becoming ubiquitous not everyone is comfortable with listening or downloading content from the web so physical distribution is still a valid mechanism for sharing audio.

Digital methods of sharing are:

- CD/DVD
- Flash Memory Stick
- MP3 player (iPod)

Analog methods of sharing:

- Transfer to cassette tape
- Transfer to ¼” tape
- 78 rpm gramophone record or wax cylinder

Transcription

Once the recording is completed, edited and published it is now in an ideal form to be transcribed into text that can also be placed online or printed to be kept with the physical copies. Additionally this is an ideal starting point for someone with the skill to develop the transcription into a manuscript for eventually publication into an e-book or physical book.

If the transcribed text is placed on the web site it is also excellent fodder for search engines that may be used for research purposes to find some of the relevant information in the audio.
Documents, Photos and Videos

Throughout the process of producing the information for the Life Story, the memories and paraphernalia of life are often turned over bringing with them a wealth of documents, letters, photographs, movies, videos and audio recordings. Some or all of this can now be published online.

The documents and photos can be scanned and placed in a gallery or slide show on the site. Movies and videos can be edited and placed online with video hosting services like YouTube where they can then be accessed via the site. Audio edited into the Life Story audio will then enrich the stories being told.

The physical versions of these would be DVD’s of photo slideshows or videos.

Photobooks

Why not combine all these physical artifacts with a little text and create a memorable photo book to sit on the coffee table as an easily accessed reminder of the days past.

With modern print on demand publishing services a stylish hardbound coffee table book of memories can be created in just such a photo-book. Several publishing services are now available online including outstanding quality from Momento.
Archiving

For the first time in human history, the non-specialist now has the chance to record someone’s Life Story, in their own voice, as a resource of knowledge for the future. With this comes a level of responsibility to maintain accessibility and care for this precious digital history.

Archiving is the process of maintaining the original in as best quality as is achievable. The great advantage of coping digital data is that it does not degrade from the original as copies are made as is the case with analog data. Just think of the poor quality of audio or video tapes once multiple generation copies have been created.

We all know of documents particularly photos that have been lost through damage or neglect. How many photos, videos and oral histories are on ¼” magnetic tape, audio/video cassette tapes or CD/DVD lying around slowly deteriorating?

Deterioration

Some items deteriorate due to physical damage. Photos are scratched, torn or pigments fade. Some items are damaged by humidity or insects, others just get lost in shoe boxes and accidentally thrown out with the detritus of life.

Audio can have the same physical harm of damaged mechanisms and torn tape. Magnetic tape and floppy disks also slowly degrade due to the earths magnetic field. The most subtle damage is in the form of technology advancement where before we have realised developments, the technology has moved on and playback devices are no longer available. Audio and video cassette players are becoming rarer and people are fast moving on from CD/DVD’s to hard drives and flash memory.

Despite the common belief of the permanence of the digital data on CD/DVD’s they also suffer from physical degradation as the coatings are scratched, weather and corrode. As is often the case it’s not the loss of the data that is the issue, it is the decay of the medium that the data is stored on.

If these valuable memories are to be maintained, transferring the data to new storage technology is important before there is any physical decay or the outdated playback systems disappear completely.

If you have important data of any kind, conversion to the latest digital data storage systems should be a priority.
Off site storage

Additional to maintaining your own physical copies of data on the latest storage technology, several companies have sprung up to supply off site, data storage systems that maintain all data for a fee.

A free service that is ideal for our purposes is Archive.org where all the completed(edited) audio files can be uploaded then linked to from the web site. This enables the web site to not have to store the actual audio files, while maintaining a secure location for the files that is fully and permanently maintained.

Storing the audio at Archive.org creates an additional portal for researches to possibly find this information for future reference.

Heritage

Initially a persons Life Story could be created to record their stories which only members of their family would have an interest in. However in time these stories could develop historical significance.

The potential historical importance of recordings from a period of time should not be underestimated. As yet we don’t know the full usefulness of a resource of multiple recorded oral Life Stories. There has been very few attempts at recording oral life stories as a way of capturing a period of history and as already mentioned it has only been in very recent years that there has been, within the ability of the average person a system to generate and publish this type of history.

With the slow accumulation of this resource and the growing awareness of oral Life Stories as a valuable source of real time, contemporary history there will be a desire to dip into these stories to discover what were the thoughts of the day.

The power of search as it continues to evolve will enable researches to search for phrases in audio to discover what people thought of a time in which they lived. In the mean time it’s important that the metadata in the ID3 tags be available to assist with the discovery of the content of the audio.

Not only will family members benefit from the stories of a relative because of their shared heritage but additionally what is being created, if we choose to make it available to the world, is a resource of human history, a heritage for the future, of the life and times of an individual, in their own voice as has never been possible before.
Things to do first

To prevent stagnation and procrastination it’s important not to delay. Despite the tendency to think there is plenty of time, there isn’t!

Here are a few suggestions to get this important project started.

- Contact the person that you wish to record and tell them that it’s time to get their story recorded.
- Pick a single story and start recording.
- Write a list of story points.
- Collect photos, letters and documents as reminders.
- Ask others to be involved.
- Start a photo-book.
- Practice recording.
- Listen to some other audio Life Stories.

Anything is better than nothing

The process of pressing start on the recorder is the most vital and important thing that can be done.

Once pressed it’s time to just talk and answer the questions of a life in a conversational manner. Anything and everything that is captured is valuable as this may be your only opportunity to record these points. Once you have been over all the ground the luxury of being able to pick and choose the best content can start but only after completing the recordings.

You can re-record and re-edit the day after tomorrow.

Start today… as it may be too late tomorrow.

Quality. It’s up to you!

An easy mistake to make is to only Think, that this is a good idea, then maybe to just Prepare, until everything is in place, in order to get it right.

There are infinite variations on how to achieve an audio Life Story. As many different ways as the individuals recorded and the style in which the whole process is developed.

If you wait for everything to be learnt and have all the systems in place to create the quality necessary, time will pass you by and the opportunity will be lost forever.
Quality is a subjective term and the variations of the completed audio will vary. One version is to complete a raw recording and have it copied onto a playback medium like a MP3 or a CD. The extreme alternative is to record in a controlled environment with the best equipment, then edit with precision to create a high quality radio style documentary. Then incorporate that into a web site with all the bells and whistles. Both alternatives are valid, it’s up to you!

With the system outlined in this guide, we are using the concept of the 80/20 rule whereby for 80% of the results an effort of 20% is required. This is all that is necessary to achieve a standard better than most people would expect.

To implement the remaining 20% of the quality and additional 80% effort is required. This is where a great deal of dedication is necessary for diminishing return.

This system is the balance that achieves the best outcomes and prevents non-action while resulting in a quality piece that family will cherish and outsiders will still be able to appreciate even though they may not be emotionally involved with the person or the subject.

**Summary**

This guide has all the basics that will enable many people to proceed towards the production of an oral Life Story. At Create Your Life Story where you downloaded this guide there are other additional resources and information that will continue to evolve over time enabling more advanced techniques for recording, editing and publishing. From time to time examples will be shared on the site of existing Life Stories as more projects are completed by the community.

You now have the basic knowledge to produce an oral Life Story. The most important thing is to get started and move forward towards actually producing audio recordings, then onto publication in whatever form you choose.

I look forward to you joining all of us at Create Your Life Story on this journey. As you know, everyone has amazing stories from their life that should be shared with the world and with your addition we are helping to get their stories to the world.
Conclusion

I hope you found this guide informative. Now you should have the basic knowledge to move forward on your project. It is your project, your own or your family's heritage and even if it is never published or heard outside of your close relations, the impact on your family can not be underestimated. This type of project can evolve into things that are unimaginable. Often it’s simply an expression of love and appreciation of someone’s life that can mean so much, sometimes the greater community can learn new things of someone they new nothing of.

To assist with the continuing development of this information for you and the community, I encourage you to go to this short survey that I have prepared. Your input will guide me in developing content for your needs additional to the already long list, including a more in depth e-book that is being produced to help you create amazing Life Stories of the people in your life.

Wishing you the very best of days.

Ian Kath.

Please Note: Highlighted text throughout this guide like this is linked to web pages for additional information. When reading this e-book on a computer, clicking on such links will take you directly to relevant sites.