

Preserving Life Stories: Understanding the Options



Exploring the primary methods of personal history preservation, and the strengths and weaknesses of each.



Decision Framework.1

Use this lens for every option:

1. *What is being preserved?*
 - *Information*
 - *Information + Voice*
 - *Information + Voice + Presence*
2. *Ease of execution*
 - *Will this realistically get done?*
3. *Long-term Experience*
 - *How will others engage with it later?*

Option 1 – Do Nothing

Pros

- ***No time, effort, or cost***
- ***No discomfort***

Limitations

- ***Information, voice, nuance, and detail are all lost***
- ***Others rely on incomplete memories***
- ***No control over what is remembered***

Doing nothing is still a decision – with permanent consequences




A magnifying glass with a gold frame is positioned over an open book. The book's pages are filled with German text, which is slightly out of focus. The magnifying glass is held at an angle, focusing on a specific area of the text. The background is a textured, light-colored surface.

Decision Framework.2

Use this lens for every option:

1. *What is being preserved?*
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Option 2 – Written

Journals, memoirs, guided books

Pros

- *Reflective and structured*
- *High control over content*
- *Familiar*
- *Can be inexpensive*

Limitations

- *No voice or tone*
- *Requires extraordinary discipline*
- *Often unfinished*
- *Sharing copies can be complicated*
 - *One book / location + one disaster = everything lost*



Best Fit

- *Those who enjoy writing*
- *When conveying emotions, future connections not a consideration*

Tools



\$ *Notebook or Journal*

\$\$ *Storyworth* welcome.storyworth.com

\$\$ *Remento* remento.co


\$ *Google Docs* docs.google.com

\$\$\$ *Memoir workshops* - *Leslie Leyland Fields,*
Marion Roach Smith

Decision Framework.3

Use this lens for every option:

1. *What is being preserved?*

- *Information* 
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- *Information + Voice + Presence*

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Option 3 – Audio

Recorded conversations or interviews

Pros

- *Captures information, voice, personality, inflection*
- *Natural, conversational*
- *Easier to begin*
- *Versatile*
- *Can be inexpensive*

Limitations

- *No visual presence*
- *Can lack structure*
- *Quality can be an issue*
- *Longer recordings harder to revisit*



Best Fit

- *Prefer speaking over writing*
- *Value hearing the voice*
- *Value emotions and inflections*

Tools

\$ *Voice recorder or family member*

\$ *StoryCorps App storycorps.org*

\$ *Zoom ****details on next slide*****

\$\$\$ *Hire a professional – conversations kept on track, edited for easy listening*



Record Your Life Story (Audio Only) – Zoom

Simple 5-Step Process:

- 1.Set Up** – Open Zoom → check mic (Settings → Audio) → enable *Local Recording*
- 2.Start** – Click **New Meeting** → **Record on this Computer**
- 3.Talk** – Share your story (early life → career/family → reflections)
- 4.Finish** – Stop recording → end meeting → Zoom saves automatically
- 5.Save & Share** – Find file (Documents → Zoom → *audio_only.m4a*) → save in 2 places (computer + cloud/flash drive)



Decision Framework.4

Use this lens for every option:

1. *What is being preserved?*

- *Information*
- *Information + Voice* ←
- *Information + Voice + Presence*

2. *Ease of execution*

- *Will this realistically get done?* ✓

3. *Long-term Experience*

- *How will others engage with it later?*



Option 4 – Video

Filmed interviews or documentary-style recordings or self recordings

Pros

- ***Captures full presence***
- ***Most immersive***
- ***Strong emotional connection***

Limitations

- ***More complex to produce***
- ***DIY can feel intimidating***
- ***Requires planning***
- ***Technology***
- ***More of an investment***





Best Fit

- *Want information AND full presence preserved*
- *Prioritize long-term experience*
- *Maintain connection with loved ones*
- *Be known to future generations*



Tools

- \$ *Smartphone camera or Zoom* **details next slide**
- \$ *YouTube (Private or Unlisted)*
- \$\$ *Dropbox*
- \$\$\$ *Hire a professional – “one and done”*

Record Your Life Story (Video) – Zoom

Simple 5-Step Process:

- 1.Set Up** – Open Zoom → check **Camera & Mic** (Settings → Video/Audio) → enable *Local Recording*
- 2.Start** – Click **New Meeting** → turn camera ON → **Record on this Computer**
- 3.Talk** – *Speak naturally* (early life → career/family → reflections)
- 4.Finish** – *Stop recording* → *end meeting* → Zoom saves automatically
- 5.Save & Share** – *Find file* (Documents → Zoom → *zoom_0.mp4*) → *save in 2 places* (computer + cloud/flash drive)

Framing Tip: • Have Camera at **EYE LEVEL** • Face window • Simple background



Decision Framework

Use this lens for every option:

1. *What is being preserved?*

- *Information*
- *Information + Voice*
- *Information + Voice + Presence* ←

2. *Ease of execution*

- *Will this realistically get done?* ✓

3. *Long-term Experience*

- *How will others engage with it later?*



What You Capture— and How It Lives On

- ***Do Nothing*** -> *Get nothing*
- ***Written*** -> *book, document, printed or digital*
 - often stored, less frequently revisited
- ***Audio*** -> *files, playlists, long-form recordings*
 - meaningful but requires time commitment
- ***Video*** -> *highlight films vs. full-length recordings*
 - most likely to be rewatched and shared

The method determines how the life is experienced later





How to choose

Step 1 - Comfort

- ***Writing vs speaking vs being on camera***

Step 2 - Priority

- ***Accuracy***
- ***Accuracy + Emotion***
- ***Accuracy + Emotion + Presence***

Step 3 - Realism

- ***What will you actually follow through on***
- ***Am I willing to hire someone to help and be done?***

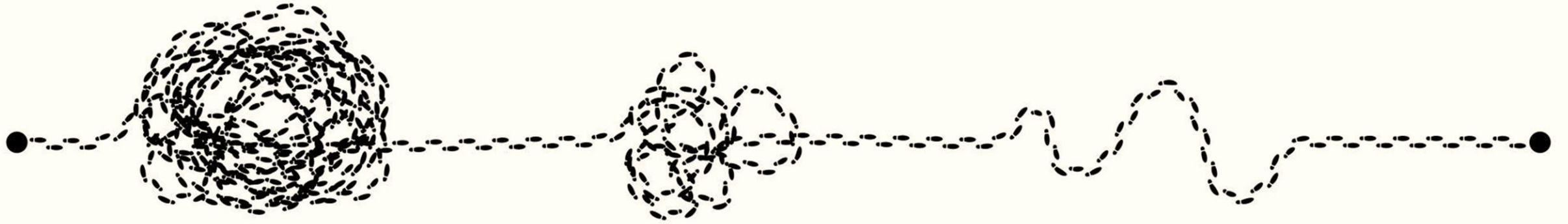
How to start - DIY

Simple entry points:

- *Write one page / life chapter*
- *Record a 20 minute conversation*
- *Focus on one theme:*
 - *Childhood*
 - *Career*
 - *Family traditions*



<u>Option</u>	<u>What It Preserves</u>	<u>Time to Complete</u>	<u>Ease of Starting</u>	<u>Likelihood of Finishing</u>	<u>Long-Term Experience</u>	<u>Typical Cost</u>
Do Nothing	Nothing intentionally	None	Easiest	N/A	Nothing retained	\$0
Written	Information (if completed)	6–18+ months	Moderate	Low–Moderate	Least immersive	\$0–\$1500
Audio	Information + Voice	Flexible (hours → months)	Easy	Moderate–High	Engaging	\$0–\$1500+
Video	Information + Voice + Presence	Flexible (hours → weeks)	Moderate	Moderate	Most immersive	\$0–\$2,500+



DIY Guidance:

- Don't aim for completeness first -> aim for discovery and momentum first
- One session is more valuable than a perfect plan
- Don't discard incomplete work, everything has value!
- Every option has tradeoffs -> the real risk is not starting

- Start -> evaluate -> pivot if necessary
- You have resources: family, guided tools, work with a professional

Start simple. Choose what you'll finish. Capture more than just facts if you can.



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