

PRINT THIS · CLOSE WINDOW



8/31/09

FAMILY TIES

Oral histories, writing, video among ways to share your family's stories

By **Roxanne Moore Saucier**
BDN Staff

Ever since I found out that Marcia Melnyk had chosen “Oral History” as one of her topics for the Sept. 26 conference of the Maine Genealogical Society in Bangor, I’ve been thinking about stories — our own as well as others,’ and how important it is that we record them somehow.

Not everything has to be a book, really. My family cherishes the story of Uncle Roddy, as a kid, watching Will Lord’s horse when a storm came up.

His comment? “Lucy let a tear out of her and headed for the woods!”

Or how about my 3-year-old grandson’s gratitude that Meme and Memere took him and his sister to a playground for a good, long play.

Andrew knew what was in his heart, and had a unique way of telling me: “Thank you for taking us to the playground and, and — thank you for being good!”

I think every family might enjoy having a little booklet of stories and sayings. And of course, they could be incorporated into the family history.

Renee Ordway, a BDN reporter whose column runs in the Saturday-Sunday edition of the paper, frequently has great little stories in her column, or sometimes the whole column is a story.

How I laughed to read last weekend about Renee as a young baton twirler, practicing her “toss turn-arounds” in the judge’s chambers at Newport District Court.

Reading other people’s writing may give you ideas about how to record your family’s stories.

Sarah Smiley’s columns in the Monday Bangor Daily News, and her book, “I’m Just Saying...,” available in local bookstores, offer great family stories, both military and otherwise.

As the mother of two sons, of course I identify with her adventures with three little boys, but it’s the things she writes about her husband that make me laugh, too.

And of course, I’d been reading Ron Brown’s Time Out columns on sports topics for many, many years. Coping with kidney disease for decades before he died recently, his love of family was always obvious in his writing.

Some of us like to write little biographies of ancestors we knew or know of. Stay tuned to this space for a story I’m planning on my cousin, Hannibal Hamlin.

Others are inspired to write about cherished topics. Uncle Roddy has written lots of "hunting stories," both those of a young man helping to feed his family in rural Maine, and those of a Mainer transplanted to Alaska via the Air Force in 1951.

Moose, elk, polar bear, walrus — at first he hunted with Native Alaskans, which we used to call Eskimos. Uncle Roddy loved being out in the woods and the wilderness as much as anybody I know, and certainly respected all that he hunted.

An airman's locker is no place to store meat, but Roddy had that problem solved. After a good meal together, he gave the meat to his fellow hunters for their families.

Many of his stories came to us in the Lower 48 along with long letters to his mother, my Grammy Moore. She would then circulate letters and family photos — he had married a Native Alaskan and they raised four children — to the Maine relatives for their enjoyment.

How about a video of relatives sitting around sharing family stories, or at least a tape of your interview with an older relative?

My 1995 video of my father telling about his time in the U.S. Navy during World War II is a beloved memento, and became a story for the BDN on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

The other interview I put on video was with Sleepy Atkins of Presque Isle, one of Maine's first warden pilots. I found the tape a few years later, after Sleepy had died, and was so thrilled to be able to call his daughter, Sandy Beck, and remind her of this treasured memento I could give to her.

These days, some people can even take a video with their cell phone. I'm not one who spends my days browsing YouTube, but I do keep up with family pictures via Facebook. That means so much when one of my sons is raising his family in Minnesota.

I wasn't there when Aidan was eating his first pickle with his mother, or sharing his first ear of corn with Grandpa Mackenzie, but how I love those little videos.

• • •

Need help finding your ancestors in the 1860 census? The Aroostook County Genealogical Society, for a Caribou Sesquicentennial project, will be in the Caribou Room at Caribou Public Library 1-8 p.m. Thursday and Friday, Sept. 3-4; and 1-4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 5.

Send genealogy queries to Family Ties, Bangor Daily News, P.O. Box 1329, Bangor 04402; or e-mail queries to familyti@bangordailynews.net.