

# Give a Father's Day Gift That Won't Be Forgotten

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Opinion

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Three recent events have brought the nation's attention to the legacies of important people in our history: the dedication of the World War II Memorial in Washington; the 60th anniversary of D-Day; and the death of former President Reagan.

In all three cases, we are fortunate to have historical documents - photographs, letters, movies and firsthand accounts - that reflect the times and the lives of the people who had such a significant impact on our country's history.

Today is a perfect time to turn our attention to the fathers, grandfathers, brothers and uncles who might not have changed history but who influenced the lives of people around them. All of them have stories worth telling and remembering.

I suggest that today you give a father the best gift of all: your time and your interest. No matter how young or how old, fathers have knowledge and wisdom to share, if only we would listen.

Ask a father to tell you stories of his childhood, of lessons learned and choices made. Ask him to tell about his parents and his grandparents and the legacies they left behind for future generations. Quiz him about his biggest joys, proudest achievements and funniest moments. Ask him to pull out some old pictures and describe the people and the events behind the photos. Ask him to share some of the significant events of his life and his hopes for the future.

If he is a veteran, check out the Web site for the Veterans History Project, [www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/)

The project collects and preserves the extraordinary wartime stories of the people who served. Time is of the essence: World War II veterans are dying at the rate of more than 1,000 a day.

Most fathers are heroes to someone. But even those who aren't have stories which others can learn from, if only to demonstrate how not to do things!

Recording stories and histories has been a passion of mine since I "interviewed" my grandfather when I was 15 years old. The tape recording we made that day became a priceless heirloom

because it's the only recording we have of his voice. He had a fatal heart attack just a few months after our interview.

Though today my business is helping people capture life stories, perhaps one of my greatest achievements is something I did for love, not money. I collaborated with my father on a book about his World War II experiences on submarines in the Pacific. When children, grandchildren and friends read the book, they experience two transformations. They see pictures of the 84-year-old grandfather they know now as he once was: young, vibrant and courageous. But the other transformation occurs within themselves. They are inspired by the stories of teamwork, persistence and service to country.

Unfortunately, I wasn't so lucky with another family member. After years of encouragement, we finally set a date to start recording the life stories that had entertained us for years. "We'll do it right after the first of the year," we agreed. But the storyteller passed away, and many stories went with him.

After interviewing countless clients and family members, I better understand two things: Most people need to tell their stories and have someone be interested, and we can learn from the triumphs and tragedies of other people without having to go through the same experiences ourselves.

I am reminded of a story told by one of my colleagues in the [Association of Personal Historians](#). A youngster decided to interview his family housekeeper for a school project. When the young boy asked the housekeeper if she would tell him her story, she burst into tears and said that every night when she went to bed she rehearsed her story, just in case someone ever asked. It's time to ask.

Every life has a story. Give someone a Father's Day gift that will never be forgotten: Ask him to tell you the stories of his life.

***Don't wait until it's too late.***