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Scrapbooking + Memoir
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ScrapMoir

**7 Steps to Combining
Your Photos, Your Memories,
Your Stories**

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7 Steps to Combining Your Photos, Your Memories, Your Stories

Bettyann Schmidt

- ☀ *Is there a relationship between journaling stories in scrapbooks and using photographs in writing memoir?*
- ☀ *Can a scrapbook album be a memoir?*
- ☀ *Can one write a memoir using scrapbook principles?*

As a scrapbook consultant, these are questions that I'm frequently asked. The answers: yes, yes, and yes. Combining photographs and principles of scrapbooking with words, the basic tool of memoir, works together to create a unique and lasting legacy for your family.


This little ebook helps you combine the best of what I've learned about scrapbooking and memoir writing, now called ScrapMoir, over the past few years. For an in depth look at either of these areas, you will find volumes lining the shelves in your local library or bookstore. My intent is to get you up to speed if you aren't already combining these two ways of saving life stories or to give you a few new ideas if you are already creating scrapmoirs.

And the finished product? Not sure if you want to create a scrapbook album, a bound book, a three-ring binder? I'll give you the facts and you can then make an informed choice.


CHAPTER 1: Let's Get Started

Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.

-- Charles Mingus (American jazz bassist and
Composer, 1922-1979)

 *But I'm not creative.*

Here's the first advice I want to share with you: This is not about "creativity." You'll see layouts in this ebook that are simple, which anyone can create using only a photo or two and a simple story. You need paper to write on or a computer, whichever you choose, or a combination of both. Do not think you have to be an artist, writer, or photographer to do this. Like Mingus said, the goal is simple. Write life stories about your photos. More on this is covered in Chapter 6, *Carpe Diem*.

 *But my photos are scattered all over the place -- in shoeboxes, file drawers and closets.*


Gather the photos you want to start with. You don't have to get all of your pictures organized. That's a big task that just slows you down, especially at the beginning. Consider doing that later. Right now, I want you to think for a little while. Yes, just think. Picture in your mind the kind of book you would like to create. Have fun. Let your imagination take you many places.

 *But I don't know where to begin.*

Begin simply. By thinking. Think about *why* you want to create a family or personal record. Take several days if you need to. Get a notebook--a cheap one will do--and write your thoughts. Then add a few notes or sketches of *what* you want to achieve.

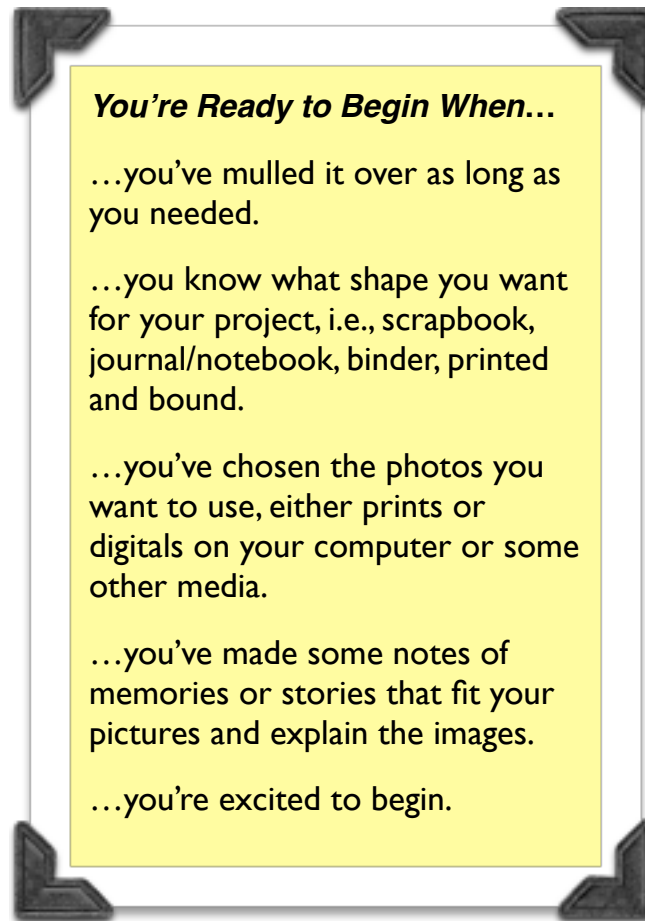
The important thing is that you know what you want to do and why.

Do you want to honor your family, your ancestors, create a family history? Do you want to craft a photojournal for your children while they are young that they will carry through life? Maybe you want to write your own story along with pictures for your children and grandchildren, and maybe you'd like to have this bound into a book. You may want to get it published.

 *But I thought scrapbooking cost a lot of money.*

Don't go out and purchase a lot of scrapbooking supplies and products. Right now you are thinking and jotting down notes. You are going through some photos and getting ideas. By knowing the *why* and the *what* of your goal, you won't need to spend large sums of money. Your focus, your stories, will guide you rather than the supplies.

And you are remembering stories and events from those pictures. Ideas are taking shape in your head. Enjoy this process. Take note of a few memories that wander to the forefront of your mind. Do *not* worry about specific dates. If you remember, fine. Don't belabor anything about this process. This is your planning stage.



Get What You Need, Only What You Need

The final getting-started step is to purchase what you need to create your project (or gather supplies you already have). Not sure? This guide will help you decide:

- **Scrapbook.** If you've envisioned a scrapbook, make sure you buy a good one; otherwise wait until you can afford a quality one. In the meantime, use your money to purchase acid-free, photosafe scrapbook pages that will eventually go into your chosen album. Or you might even choose a different format until you can afford a good scrapbook album. Don't skimp on your album, you're creating a legacy document. Rather than choose a cheaply made album, just use pages or notebook or binder for right now.

- **Notebook or journal** – the kind you write in with a pen. This is not only an accepted method, it may be more important than you think as future generations will treasure seeing your story in your own handwriting. A book of unlined, rather stiff and crisp pages is best. The size is according to the vision you had when we were in the planning stage. There are some beautiful journals on the market, but you can also use a less expensive or plain one.

A good **pigma ink pen** for writing if you choose this option. There are many colors, but black is enough.

- **Three-ring binder.** There are binders made for scrapbooking, so check online or a scrapbook store or craft store in the scrapbook supply section. These usually come with page protectors in which you slip a finished page. You can also use an 8-1/2 x 11-inch binder with cardstock purchased from a craft or scrapbook store. Use good cardstock, and look for sales. Page protectors for the 8-1/2 x 11-inch binders will work. You can even use tabs if you want to make sections in your book.
- **Printed and bound book.** There are many services advertised on the Internet that can produce a bound book for you. Some are expensive, some not, and most offer different sizes of books. It is important to choose a service that provides one or more templates with plenty of room for the text of your story. Don't go with a book template that only allows for digital photos or photos and a few lines of text. If you have a computer and Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, or other digital photo software program, you can make your own book pages and have them printed to insert into an album, or you can print them if you have the right printer. You can also use a word processor like Microsoft Word, insert scanned photos into the page, and print your pages on high-grade printer paper. You could then have them bound into a book inexpensively.
- If working with actual photos (not digital), you will need **acid-free adhesive**. There are many to choose from in craft stores and scrapbooking stores. Double-sided tape easily rolled from a dispenser is my choice, but there are now photosafe glue sticks as well.

- A supply of **photo-mounting paper and scrapbook embellishments are optional**. It's easy to let embellishments eat up your budget and your energy. You can create a classic book, either printed or handwritten, with simply a computer and a printer or a good pen on good paper--and, of course, your photos and stories.

CHAPTER 2 ~ Step 1: Photos and Memories, Simply the Best

“Simply the best” is the term I’ve always used when teaching scrapbook classes and workshops. This means, first of all, choosing from your stack of selected photos the one or two that tell the story. Let’s consider a big family party celebrating your grandmother’s 80th birthday. All family members are seated around the dining room table, the one where you’ve eaten nearly every Sunday afternoon for as long as you can remember. You have memories of eating at that antique oak table, laughing at stories and sharing the warmth and closeness of family.

You have a picture of Grandmother wearing her favorite dress for her party, the one with the lace collar and the floral gauzy fabric. The birthday cake is sitting in front of her on the table, all 80 candles ablaze. She is getting ready to blow them out, inhaling a deep breath.

The next photo shows the great grandchildren all huddled around her in her favorite armchair in the living room. She has her aged hand atop one of their little heads. Grandmother always loved the grandchildren and now the great ones. She has that contented half smile on her face.

As you go through the stack, you realize there are so many photos of your grandmother that you want to cherish forever. Each one tells a story.

**One photo tells the whole story
if you know what the story is.**

Think about the one story you want to tell this time. You may want to write more than a single story about your grandmother. Okay, think about those as stories. If you want to write a story that speaks to the essence of her entire influence on your life, which photos would depict that? Take a close look at those images. Find the story you really want to tell now. Then find the one or two photos that let you tell that story.

And while you’re looking, examine the background because sometimes there are people or items there that you might overlook. For instance, I have an old photo of my paternal grandfather’s farm and two family members in the forefront. In the background stands



Grandpa's old car with the running board that I used to jump on and ride all the way up the driveway when he came home from work.

I'd forgotten about that old car and about standing on the running board, the gravel stirring up dust all around me. I can feel that experience now when I look at that picture.

Listen to your photos speak.

Somewhere in your photo supply, there are stories exactly like mine. Probably a lot you've forgotten. Those are "simply the best." Write stories about those.

CHAPTER 3 ~ Step 2: It Starts With You

Have you noticed that on most family trees, the box where you write your own name comes first, and then you work your way up? Above your name are two spaces on either side of the page with lines leading to them. This is where you write the names of your father and mother. Then above your father's name are two lines leading to the names of his mother and father. Same for your mother's side. You keep going up as far as you want or you can.

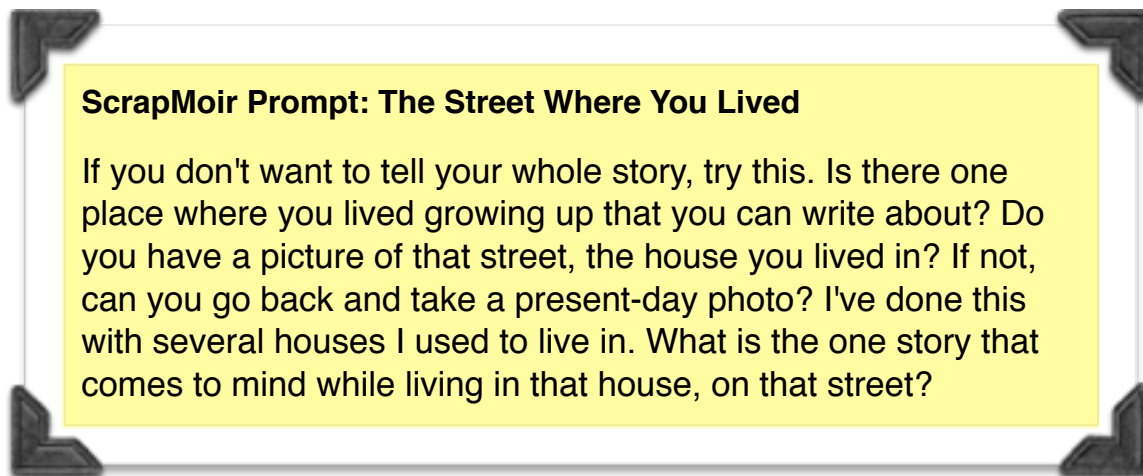
Similarly, your story starts with you. The stories of your parents and ancestors are part of your story because there are your roots. They are who *you* are, like it or not, in some cases. I'm the person I am today because of my roots. Similarly, my descendants' lives, my children, have something to do with *me*.

One of the best gifts you can give your family is telling your own story and how you came to be the person you are today. So this is a family history? Maybe and maybe not. If you aren't compelled to create an entire family history, then that's not what it is. At least at the moment. Someday you may want to undertake that project.

Telling your own story, however, cannot be told in a vacuum. There are influencing factors in your life. Not all of those influences come from family. For instance, I grew up in the Catholic Church, attended Catholic school for 10 years. Those years molded me in lots of ways. I grew up in the city, in the heart of the inner city, in a predominantly German neighborhood called "Over the Rhine." Where I grew up has an influence on my life today.

We've changed since our childhood and continue to change the older we get. Children grow into adults and, hopefully, we grow mentally as we age. But turning your back on who and what you were (and perhaps still have traces of) will not tell your story as honestly as you can. My gift to my family is more precious by telling the stories that shaped me. The bad as well as the good. They deserve to know the real "me." I want them to understand the person who is telling the story.

I've realized, by creating scrapbooks and writing my stories, that I am *not* the people who influenced me. I've gone my own way in life while retaining some of the good in the people who shaped me. Many wonderful people in my family have had a lasting impact on who I am. Realizing this is an added gift to you when you create scrapbooks or write memoir. You learn to view your past through a different window.



CHAPTER 4 ~ Step 3: The Formalities

Among the favorite scrapbook themes to document are weddings. Opportunities for creativity abound here. Personally, I love black-and-white photos on black scrapbook pages with writing in a white pen, or computer printing black on white linen cardstock. Such elegance. Some weddings are glamorous affairs, the white lace and satin types.

My Aunt Dot had one of these elegant ceremonies, but I was only a toddler then and never had any photos. February, 2010, my aunt died, and at her funeral were albums, binders, and walls displayed with pictures of her life, two of which I captured with my own camera and had printed so I could create a layout of her influence in my life and her passing. I also owned a funny story about her courtship with my Uncle Bill, which he was still sharing with everyone at the funeral.

The story goes that as a baby my two young aunts, my father's sisters, spoiled me so much that when suitors came to call I did not like it one bit. The first time Uncle Bill appeared, I kicked him "in the shins," as he put it. Of course, he realized he had to

tolerate this behavior because everyone in the family made light of it. They laughed and thought it was “cute.” I came to love that man, and still do. He and my aunt had a large hand in raising me. I lived with them for weeks on end. They had one of the happiest and best-run homes I’ve ever to be in. And they had seven children.



I created several layouts of my aunt’s funeral, since all seven of my cousins were together with their father. Above is one of them.

Funerals are another formal event, and gone are the days when taking photographs is looked upon as seedy. Now photos of the deceased’s life are stored on DVDs and shown on large screens, and framed pictures are set near the casket.

People comment that the only time families get together anymore are at weddings and funerals in the hectic world we live in. Use those opportunities to capture family photos. Some of the photos may help you tell your stories.

Take a look at your formal photos or the aged ones where everyone always looked so proper and see what stories you can write about them. Try your hand at a family tree. Interview your living relatives; they may have some stories to pass along to you. Every family must have an historian. You may need to be that one, like me.

CHAPTER 5 ~ Step 4: Do You Know Where Your Children Are?



A favorite layout of a group of photos showing when the older children were still at home. Creating these pages in my scrapbook albums, I get to re-live the moments.

I remember a young mom telling a story about ten years ago, while I was still a new scrapbook consultant, about her oldest son visiting a friend who showed off all of his pictures in albums his mother had created. I listened to the story of how her son came home and asked "Why aren't there any photos of me?" He wondered if he'd been adopted. She stated, "I felt so bad about all those boxes of pictures stored in closets all over the house and decided I had to get them into albums for my children." And she did.

This mom did an amazing job of organizing the photos in a way that worked for her. She started with one book that was so simply created that it was beautiful. What impressed me most was the writing she did on each page. She wrote the important milestones of the children's lives with a neat hand and a black pen on each of the white pages. Only a few embellishments graced her pages. In her simple style, she was able to complete a dozen albums in a short period of time.

I was attending a huge scrapbook convention at the time and watched her come on stage, someone behind her pulling a cart of all of her albums. The halls outside the convention auditorium were adorned with select pages from her albums on display. I'll never forget looking at those pages on the walls and thinking how amazing they were. And knowing how fortunate her children were to have these keepsakes in their mother's handwriting. This was a legacy of the finest sort.



I also keep track of my grandchildren and other children in my scrapbook albums. This is my niece Claudia, who is a precocious and creative child, also photogenic. I love her imagination. Claudia supplied the story. This was a no-brainer layout.

Another scrapbook consultant a few years after that did a presentation that brought tears to eyes of almost every mother in attendance. Her son's birthday was celebrated with the usual childhood party, the cake, the party hats and treats, and the games and gifts. After the party, her son had a sleepover.

Late into the night, she heard the little boys, still awake in her son's room, playing with the new gifts, talking, laughing, and she crept up the stairs to the top step, and listened. She told how she realized this was an event her boy would want to remember, and she would want to remember. It was a precious story that might never be repeated.

The next day, she got her scrapbook and wrote a letter to her son, which she adhered onto a page. She told the story of sitting on the step outside his room listening to the play and laughter, how they stayed up nearly the whole night, giggling and whispering. She closed the letter with, “Mommy was very tired the next morning.”

The best gift you can give a child is the legacy of your words.

Remember back in Chapter 2, I urged you to find “simply the best.” For this mom, the story of her son’s birthday wasn’t 20 photos of a birthday cake and little kids running around. It was one or two photos and a letter to her son.

Many moms choose to write letters to their children for their scrapbooks. I met another such woman who created an album for her son for his high school graduation, and in it were letters she’d written throughout the years when her emotions prompted her to tell him directly how she felt about him, or some of his accomplishments.

Recently, after one of my ScrapMoir posts on <http://WomensMemoirs.com> was published, I received a heartwarming comment from a reader, stating she was going to go back to the photo albums of her children and write stories about them. This made me so happy.

Know where your children are. Know where your grandchildren are. Keep them safe and sound in a scrapbook, family history or memoir of your life where they belong.

CHAPTER 6 ~ Step 5: *Carpe Diem*

Each day is a little life. ~ Schopenhauer

Life isn't a matter of milestones but of moments. ~ Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy

Sometimes the things we remember most about our lives are not the big events, the celebrations, the accolades. Instead they are the small things that happen everyday. They stick in the mind over the years, and we’re surprised that we still own them when so many other happenings might have erased them.

**The ordinary
is extraordinary.**

One ordinary day when two of my granddaughters were visiting, we set out in the car to go to town and get groceries. I looked over my shoulder to the back seat to make sure the girls were safely buckled. They looked so cute that I grabbed the camera out of my bag (I've learned to keep it handy). Of course, as soon as they saw the camera, they started with the bunny ears behind each other's heads. I turned back to the front to check that I had a good photo. By the time I decided to take one more, the older, at age



The youngest two granddaughters. It's the little things I want to remember.

eight, had found the cushion my husband sometimes used to support his back when he drove. The cushion had a strap that slipped over the car seat. Erica had put the cushion behind her head and pulled the strap over her forehead.

I think the normal expression on Erica's face is what made me laugh. She's like that. She has a dry sense of humor for her young age. I focused again and got that image as well. It was just too precious to lose. That was indeed Erica.

After my digital prints came a few weeks later, I sat and looked at that one of the two girls for a few minutes. It just spoke to me. I still had the digital on my hard drive, so I

quickly loaded up my photo imaging software and created the layout. I intended to just put it in the granddaughters' scrapbook, but I liked the photo itself so much that I knew it would also appear in my family memoir. I'll write a little story about Erica and Rachel, the one's dry humor and the other's playfulness. Their children will love reading the story someday.

Just a simple everyday event like that is all you need to document your life in a way that takes center stage. People's personalities are seen in their photos, but you have to provide the descriptions of those personality quirks and the stories that describe them.

This is not "creativity." It's mindfulness.

Life is full of little things that are missed everyday by the human eye. Becoming aware of life around you does not take creativity. It takes reminding yourself to do it and then using what you see.

Look around at the people in your life, in your family, observe them when they are just living their everyday lives. Their words will help you tell the simple stories in the project you're creating.

CHAPTER 7 ~ Step 6: Social Studies

When I was in Catholic elementary school, one of our subjects was social studies. This consisted of geography and history, combined into one subject. It makes some sense when you think about it. They really do go together. The nuns covered both but in a way that supported that theory. We learned the geography of the states in our country, which land was explored by which early settlers, Christopher Columbus, the Pilgrims and the American Indians. That was in the early years. We then moved to world history and geography, the wars, the kings, the dictators.

Another part of social studies was our own community.

Place and History

The place where you live and the history behind it should be explored in your stories. That could be your earliest home, a place you lived for a while, or the place you live now. Some of us have lived in the same place all of their lives.

It's not difficult to research the history of a place or location with today's electronic resources. I've been gathering information for several months on the community where I live now, though it's not my own birthplace or where I grew up. I've lived here for 23 years, however, and I'm pretty sure I'll be here the rest of my life, so I'd like to be able to

write more about it. It's the place my husband grew up, and where his father was born and raised.

Researching Your Place

We have an Archives in our little town as well as a History Museum. Most of what I've turned up, though, has been on the Internet. I recently learned there were tobacco wars fought around here in the early 1900s. This part of Tennessee is known for its dark-fired tobacco. When they're firing it in the fall, the scent of barbecue wafts through the air, and smoke rises out of the barns causing visitors to think the barns are burning.

About a hundred years ago, at the time of the tobacco wars, large tobacco companies wanted to pay farmers less money for their crops. Since a tobacco crop supported a family for a whole year, the offer was bound to create ill-will. The situation became aggravated when one county's farmers agreed to the lower price while the other county refused, hoping to force the price back higher. The result? The two counties became

Visit local historical societies and use the Internet to learn more about your town.

enemies. Night Riders, from both sides of the argument, burned the other's wheat because of their differences over selling the tobacco. Several times, explosives were placed in the wheat, and when the threshing took place, lives were lost. Neither side would destroy the tobacco crop -- that was their livelihood.

I was intrigued when I read this. Sad but intrigued. It spurred me on to learn more about my small town.

Since I've lived here for 23 years, this is part of my memoir. I have photos of old farmers and their families who have died here, people I knew and loved. Each of them played a part in the history of this old town, as did my husband's family.

This is farm country in the heart of the Bible Belt. The little white wooden churches should be painted gold to match the rich histories they have. One of the retired pastors here just turned 102 and has finished his memoir. He remembers every church he has pastored his long life and every funeral. He still appears at some funerals as a guest speaker. He is a deep well of knowledge for me. He resides in an assisted living facility, and I love to visit him and take notes. I know he will not be here forever.

Recording your visits to other places

Geography and history also can be recorded when you travel. I've learned a lot about the southern states, especially Mississippi, because we've visited there often. When Katrina swept two of our favorite towns away, Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian, we learned even more about the area. We have photos of our visits. This is material for my memoir.



This is a layout before Katrina. Bay St. Louis was destroyed, but the Catholic church is being rebuilt. We loved this little town.

ScrapMoir Prompt: Do You Remember Where You Were When...

I remember where I was on 9/11. I remember where I was and what I was doing on the morning of John F. Kennedy's assassination. I've lived to see an African American in the White House. That's history. Where you were then is geography. Use these in your scrapbooks and memoir to make them rich.

Write down 3 major historical events that took place during your lifetime. Write about where you were and what you were doing when they happened.

CHAPTER 8 ~ Step 7: The Sands of Time

I admit to watching one daytime TV soap opera, *Days of Our Lives*. I've watched this show off and on since 1970 when I was in the hospital with pneumonia. My roommate (yes, back then we had them) was a sweet woman with grown children, and everyday she watched her soap, her "story." That's what women here in the south call the soaps.

I was too sick to care what show she watched, and, besides, I was used to working during the day. I was pregnant at the time, and my older room partner fussed over me like a mother. As I began to get well, I enjoyed her TV story, and from then on when I was not working I watched "Days."

At the beginning of every "Days" show, an hourglass appears on screen with sand filtering through. The announcer, the same one I've heard for 40 years, says, "Like sand through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives."

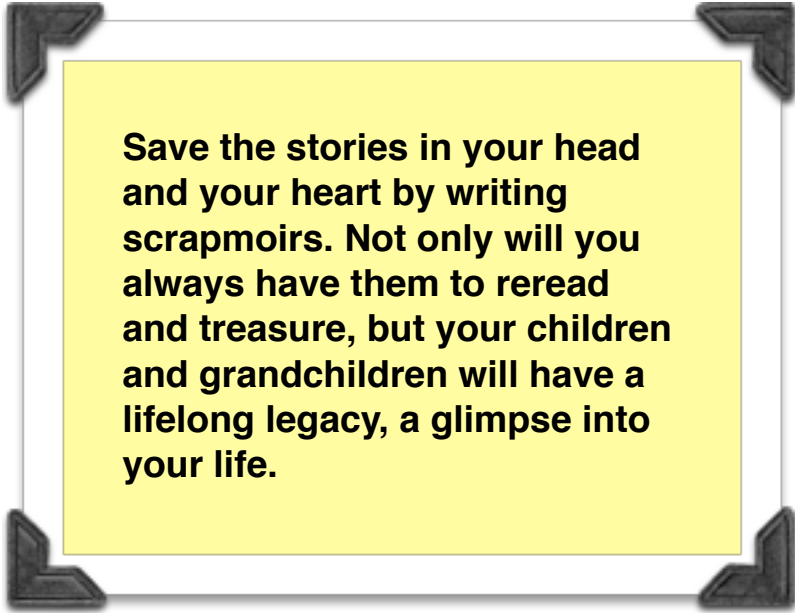
When I hear those words, I'm reminded how true they are. Our days are flowing like grains of sand, and we miss so many of them because of our fast paced lives. The only way I know to save the days of *my* life is to record some of what I notice and pay attention to before it slips away.

Like sand through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.

When I was young, I remember how eager I was to pass the age milestones, like 18, and then 21. I also remember hearing, from older people of course, that the years flow faster the older one becomes, and I shouldn't be in such a hurry to get old. Words that fall deaf on a young kid. But I've seen that happen now. The years from 40 to 50 were like the Indianapolis 500. They were a blur as they whizzed by. If I hadn't kept a record of some kind, they'd be gone completely.

Will I always remember living at Grandpa's farm in Ohio? Or the big city we moved to and I grew up in? There's a chance I won't. But I will have the memories, the photos and the stories locked away for that day if it comes. At this time, now, I still have them in my head and my heart, and so this is the time to save them.

I urge you, also, to take the time and the effort to preserve the most precious of your possessions -- your life stories.



Save the stories in your head and your heart by writing scrapmoirs. Not only will you always have them to reread and treasure, but your children and grandchildren will have a lifelong legacy, a glimpse into your life.

Please join me at: <http://journey2f.blogspot.com> where I regularly blog and at <http://WomensMemoirs.com> where I am a regular guest blogger. You can find my articles under the category of ScrapMoir.

From the Publisher

Women's Memoirs [<http://WomensMemoirs.com>] provides information for women interested in writing their life stories. Women's Memoirs also publishes ebooks covering topics such as:

Top 10 Reasons to Write Your Memoir

Journaling Essentials: Everything Your Need to Know to Start and Keep a Journal

Writing in Five: Prompts to Get You Moving

Scrapbooking + Memoir = ScrapMoir: 7 Steps to Combining Your Photos, Your Memories, Your Stories

Be sure to visit our website and sign up to receive our weekly digest of articles covering memoir writing prompts, memoir book reviews, book business, editors on editing, ScrapMoirs, journaling, writing and healing, author interviews, and more.

Women's Memoirs also sponsors monthly memoir writing contests, each with a specific theme. For information, please go to:

<http://womensmemoirs.com/contests>