

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 71 - Write Your Story

I was just sitting here thinking back to a story my Aunts Dot and Emily used to tell us about their growing up years. It was during World War II, and they lived close to an Air Force Base. The story involved airmen on leave, rolling up the rug, and dancing the day away to Glen Miller, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and other Big Band tunes that were popular in the 40s.

One of the stories regaled us with Aunt Emily dancing on top of a table! Of course, it was all in good fun, and nothing questionable was going on. They were just enjoying the moment. Now, I knew her as a very strait-laced woman in her later years, but apparently, she sure knew how to have a good time during her younger days.

Thinking about this story made me chuckle, but it also made me wonder. How many of my family stories have been lost through the years? There's one I'm very glad didn't get lost, as it ended up getting me out of trouble:

Growing up, I was like most kids. My parents were 'born' the day I recognized them. I never truly thought about them ever being kids. The fact my mom really was a young woman once came to light one day.

Her closest friend, Pat, had come to visit. I was in high school, and currently suffering 'jail time' (let's face it, I was grounded until I was 65 years old) for skipping school. During Pat's visit, I did more than my share of teenage moping. Pat noticed, asked what was up, so I told her.

That was almost 50 years ago, and to this day, I can still hear her as she laughed hysterically. At first, I thought she was laughing at me, but before embarrassment could grab hold, I noticed my mom was shaking her head, and had a frown on her face. I recognized that look in her eyes. It said, 'Shut up, Pat!' (I knew, because that same look had been directed at me more times than I can count.)

I realized something BIG was about to be revealed. As quickly as I could, I encouraged Pat to spill the beans – even under the threat of mom’s eyes being turned on me. And, boy, am I glad Pat spilled.

It seems that one day, my mom, Pat, and a couple of their friends decided to skip school. They boarded a train in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and headed to Chicago. That in itself wasn’t so bad, but I knew I at least had a few rounds of ammunition building up. But that wasn’t the end of the story.

They went shopping and spent all their money. Like, in not having enough to get home. So, one of the girls had a brother who owned a bar. They decided to go there until they could either find someone to send the money to get them home, or they could figure something else out.

Now, keep in mind. Skipping school got me grounded until I was 65 (well, it was really only six weeks, but it felt like another 45 years). But going to a bar? At sixteen years old? Oh, I would have been grounded for the rest of my life.

That story not only got me off restriction, but also made me realize my mom was more than just a mother. She was a person. She had been a baby, a child, a teenager. There was a FUN woman behind the Mom shield! She began to become ‘real’ to me, in a way she never had been before.

Now, that is a story I will always remember. My mom was a fun woman, with a slightly checkered past. She wasn’t perfect after all.

But a question I’ll always ask myself is, what stories weren’t told? Unfortunately, it will never have an answer.

And when I realized that, I also knew I needed to write these stories down, as well as my own. And so should you. We all have one. And all of them should be shared.

Regardless of who you are, where you were born or your life’s circumstances, you have a story. You may consider it boring. It may feel mundane and uninteresting. Or it could be fraught with pain and fear or exhilaration and curiosity. But regardless, it is your story. You have family and friends who would love to hear it.

Perhaps it is time you begin to think about sharing it. Maybe not to the world at large, but to the few who may be very interested in what you have to say.

I thought about all of this when I began to shift my life in a different, unexpected direction. Maybe it was time to write my story. I have grandchildren now. Although time may allow me to see them grow up into young men and women, I doubt I will be around when their children or grandchildren come of age.

Occasionally, those children, and their children, may hear stories of their crazy great-grandmother who went against the familial norm and went looking for greener pastures (quite literally, I might add – I have a little over 60 acres of them). But I still want to be ‘real’ to them.

My desire is for my greats and great greats to know I was willing to go against all odds and opinions to live my dream. And maybe, by doing that, I can offer encouragement for them to do the same.

I know what you are thinking. What story? I’m boring! My life is boring! I beg to differ with you. There are people out there who will disagree with you. There may be future generations who still want to get to know you, even if it is through the pages of a book. Writing your own story doesn’t have to be difficult. Just start at the beginning. As you think back, add a story or two. Those stories don’t have to be yours but can be what someone else remembers about that time. The important part is that you put the story on paper.

Not sure what to write about? Here’s the thing about writing. All too often, you find you have trouble putting the first words on paper. But once you start, your mind opens up, and more words are written. Before long, you may just have a waterfall of thoughts that are begging to be shared.

If you still aren’t sure, here is a list of some of the things you can write about:

Your birth – the date, time, city, state, hospital

Your family – who were your parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, etc.

Write about your education. If you have a college degree, explain what it is and why you chose that field. If you don’t, tell them why.

Share your earliest Memories, your favorite foods, best friend, worst enemy.

What were your Dreams & Goals? Were they the same thing? How were they different? How did you blend them?

Talk about your first Crush and first Love – who were they? What age were you?

Are you single, married or divorced? What made you fall in love? Out of Love?

Another good topic is to share your world views. Expand it from your child's eye to your current thoughts. You could also add in your Political Views – & why.

Remember that dreaded childhood essay, How I Spent my Summer Vacation? Write about how you spent vacations as a child and compare them to the ones you had as an adult. Share stories of things that happened to you throughout your life.

Other topics you can write about are your Hobbies – from childhood to adult; share your employment; and what You Wish You Had Known.

A great thing to do is to share recipes – either your own or family favorites. You can also write down Craft Directions – knitting, crochet, sewing, weaving. And if you do, tell them why you love this craft, and who may have been the recipient of the project.

In all honesty, the list is virtually endless. For each person writing their story, there could be thousands of subject matters. The point is, if you are having trouble getting started, choose one and start writing.

One of the best things about writing your story is you don't need very many supplies. A notebook and a pen are perfect. However, once you get started, you may find you need two, three or even four notebooks to get the full story down.

If you are like me, mild arthritis in my fingers and hands prevents me from over-indulging in the writing process. So, I use a computer, with a flash drive for back up.

It may also help to have a few other things, such as Photos. Be sure to try and identify people, places, and dates. You can add to your story with memories of all three.

Art Pencils are another great thing to have. You can add a sketch or diagram to what you are writing about. These images help to add depth to your story.

A tape recorder (the kind used for dictation – if you can even find them anymore), or a phone that records are great for recording memories offered by other people. By adding stories from others, our story ends up more interesting.

I always keep a Flash Drive for backup. But I also use it to transfer my writing from my desktop computer to my laptop. This way, I can continue to write my story even if I am stuck in a waiting room, or when I take myself to lunch on errand day.

When it comes to actually publishing your story, you may feel that a few notebooks and/or a print copy is enough. And in some cases, it may be.

But if you want to take it to a new level, consider having it published. Self-publishing is a rising industry, and there are multiple places you can turn your Memoirs into a bound book. With self-publishing, you can make enough copies for any family members or friends who would love to have a copy.

You may still think writing your story is a waste of time. But believe me, it isn't. Writing your story will not only allow future generations to get to know you better, but it may also help you to learn who you are and who you really want to be.

It may awaken a long-lost dream or goal. And writing is one of the ways mental health professionals use to help someone over a hurdle or obstacle in life. Writing your story can be cathartic and help you to find a certain level of peace with a particularly difficult life experience.

And here's a note: If this is the reason you are writing your story, and if you discover it is too difficult to work through, talk with a mental health professional to help you through the process.

The bottom line? Writing is beneficial but writing your story priceless. And if you think no one will want to read it, think again. Better yet, think of becoming 'friends' with your future generations. That will make it well worth grabbing a pen and paper.

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If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting for the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to relax and enjoy.

Relax & Enjoy!

Julie