

ROOTS AND BRANCHES

MIRIAM WEINER *Special to the Jewish Standard*

MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS...

Although it is unlikely the Academy of Motion Picture Arts Science which dispenses the coveted Oscars will create a new category for video family histories, companies such as Nostalgia Production in Los Angeles have emerged to convert old home-movie footage and stills, along with photos and documents, into "Your Family History: See it Now." The family documentary includes appropriate background music, interviews with family members, a nostalgic look at old photos interspersed with family film footage, and a look at documents which chronicle the history of the family such as the passenger ship manifest record, "first papers" of the immigrant, passport documents, school records, and other memorabilia.

Certainly the legacy for your grandchildren and future generations is worth the effort to preserve your family history. Even more importantly, old family photos and documents are frequently lost during transitions such as a move, death, divorce, or other reasons and we lose track of our belongings.

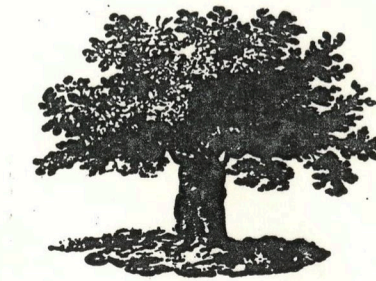
A recent flood in the Montreal area

resulted in the loss of many unique photo albums, letters, scrapbooks, and documents, according to Judy Nefsky, director of the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives in Montreal. "People should consider the safety of the material in their homes and its preservation for future generations," she said.

Why is it that we never seem to get around to these things? Photos collect in shoe boxes, frequently without names and dates on the back. Important documents are put away in a "safe place," and many years later, who can remember where the "safe place" is?

Many old and priceless photos of our ancestors have become damaged through the years and are fading quickly. The restoration of photos is accomplished with dramatic results by skilled photographers and many large department stores include this specialty in their photography studio.

When writing on the backs of old photos, use a Stabilo Art pencil available at art shops for about a dollar. Beware, however, of using too much pressure, and do not write opposite the person's



face. An alternative is to write on gummed labels and then apply them to the back of the photo.

Holocaust survivors have a unique history of their own. Survivors are increasingly willing to be interviewed about their experiences, and Holocaust Resource Centers throughout the United States have programs for conducting these interviews and preserving them in archives. The Center for Holocaust Studies in Brooklyn will send an interviewer to homes in the New York area. In Detroit, the Holocaust Memorial Center has amassed a significant collection of oral histories. At Yale University, the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies records the memories of survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust.

Survivors brought precious little with them when they finally emerged from the camps and ghettos. However, for those few who were able to bring "mementos" from those dark days, there are several appropriate repositories for this material, including the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, the New York City Holocaust Memorial Museum, the

United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, the Holocaust Memorial Center in Detroit, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

The American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors has collected historical and biographical data from over 60,000 survivors and their families which will eventually be centralized with other survivor data at the United States Holocaust Museum.

In the event your family has a historic collection of documents or artifacts, your local Jewish historical society would welcome the opportunity to evaluate your collection and direct you to the proper repository for its preservation and display.

Your original documents, such as marriage licenses, *ketubot*, birth certificates, naturalization records, passport documents, and family letters should be preserved in a safe-deposit box, preferably with each document being encased in an acid-free envelope. Photo copies of each document should be available for reference when needed, thereby reducing the handling of the original documents.

The art of interviewing people on videotapes for the purpose of revealing family history and recording personal experiences for the future requires special skill and techniques. Keep in mind that you are the producer and director of this show, and you should have a mental picture of how you want the finished program look.

The video should be taped and edited in a documentary film style, incorporating interviews with family members and

focusing on those who are the most articulate and knowledgeable about the family history. Old photographs and mementos should be interspersed with comparisons between jobs and lifestyles of family members today and those of their ancestors—all woven together to tell each family's unique and personal story.

We can't all be movie directors and produce "Oscar" contenders. However, we can still record and preserve our family history, utilizing the many inexpensive forms of recording equipment available. A small recorder and a quiet place with a senior member of the family can produce a monologue of memories and history.

A Beginner's Kit on how to research your family history—which includes charts, list of archives and libraries, bibliography, maps, family group sheets, and more—can be ordered from Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (cost \$10 plus \$1 postage and handling).

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