

Everybody has a story. In fact, you might say that we *are* our stories. The narrative that explains who and why we are is perhaps our most important possession. It is uniquely ours. Just as every fingerprint, every face is different so is every story different. We use our personal life journeys to explain who we are and why we are. Within the depths of our story are the myths and truths that tell of our origins, our dreams, our hopes and desires.

Technically speaking you might think that our birth is the beginning of our story. But human beings don't typically remember their birth and even if we did it would not be a story that would have much shape or meaning for infants, though cute and precious, are far too busy making sense of the world to notice much about what is around them. Only later, as we mature and manage the basics of communication, mobility and intellect are we prepared to store the facts and feelings that will become our "story".

No, I believe that for most of us our story begins with our Grandparents. Why grandparents? Well, firstly it is because they have had the most direct influence on our parents who in most cases are our primary caregivers when we are young. But secondly it is because grandparents have a unique relationship with those who are born to their children. Grandchildren are direct descendants but unlike the children that grandparents have already raised, these children are born at a time when Grandparents are more mature, more settled and have often put behind them the major part of their life. Grandparents are often less driven by the immediate concerns of building a family nest egg and might even be retired by the time their grandchildren become old enough to interact with them in a meaningful way.

But there is even more to the grandparent-grandchild relationship that makes it a special one. You see, grandparents are inevitably products of a different age, a different time and a generation far removed from their grandchildren. Grandparents are often able to combine the wisdom of experience with the knowledge gained over a lifetime to be able to fully value the relationship with their grandchildren.

And it is precisely because that Grandparent/Grandchild relationship is so different that I believe it vital that we each preserve and pass on to our children the memory of our Grandparents (and Great-grandparents if you can remember). In many ways it is not only foundational to our own personal stories but the legacy of maintaining a written record of the relationship and memories of your grandparents will enhance and enrich the lives of those who will one day look to these stories of their ancestors to explain even more of their own stories.

So I'd like to propose that each of you take a little time and write down the stories you remember of your grandparents. If they are alive, call them and record their voices and stories as a cherished possession. And if they are no longer living then take time to set out on paper what you can remember of them. Use pictures, recordings, anecdotes and stories to recall the kind of people they were and perhaps some of the obstacles that they faced in their lives. Consider:

- What did your grandparents want most to pass on to you?
- Can you recall the smells, accents and foods that were part of your grandparent's home?
- Do you have any possessions that belonged to your grandparents? Did your parents give you something that they received from their parents? What do these possessions tell you about your grandparents?
- Are there personality characteristics of your grandparents that you see in yourself?
- If your grandparents were to see the world that you live in today, what would they say?

While I realize that your stories of grandparent memories might be highly personal I also know that preserving and maintaining these stories is part of community memory. I would be happy to post your memories on a special blog that I will create titled "Our Grandparent Legacies: Stories and Memories". Or, you may simply write your memories and store them for those who come after you. Either way, I believe that you and your descendants will find richness in the sharing of these special stories.

Ultimately Torah is the collection of stories and ethics that shaped the lives of our ancestors. In Torah we have been given a gift of wisdom, of spiritual richness and of intrigue that is of ultimate value in our lives. While we can never hope to recreate the stories of all those ancestors who came before us perhaps with the memories of grandparents we can find our own souls...our own voice.

B'vracha,

Rabbi David Kaiman