

# Combining two great pastimes

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I have always hated school trips. I could never stand the long bus rides, the unstructured time with teachers frazzled and kids running wild; the time between when you first arrive and are placed in different activities, and then we have to remember where you put your lunch; did I end up on your seat in the bus that went back to the school, or in the huge pile of lunchboxes on the curb? So, that is why when my class went to the Florida Keys for our 8th grade field trip, I went straight home to my parents and told them flat out that I did not want to go.

My parents, after looking over the brochure, agreed with me. It would have been interesting, except for the fact that we would only spend about a day and a half actually in the Florida Keys, and the rest of the week traveling or at Carowinds, running wild. That might seem fun to some people, but it was definitely not for me. So, instead I decided to do a little community service. But again, I did not want to do the regular kind of community service: watching little kids as they run, screaming all over the place.

I wanted to help people, but helping people can mean lots of different things. Deciding to help people is the first step, but the second and hardest step is finding who to help and how to help them. I love to write and I also love history, so I decided to talk to a Social Work Professor to see if she had any ideas. We met at a coffee shop, so I took the opportunity and ordered a few different kinds of cookies. She described to me her work, which was helping older people preserve their memories. That sounded fascinating to me so I asked a few more questions and after listening to her I decided to interview two older people about their childhoods.

First I thought up a couple questions to ask them. I thought about when my interviewees grew up and came up with a few questions I could ask them. Some of these questions were the regular: Where were you born? What was your first job like? But a few questions were about how or if they were affected by some of our country's major events including World War II, the Great Depression, and Segregation. I first interviewed an older woman who had a very interesting life and then I interviewed another woman who was a little younger, but who still had amazing memories to share. I taped both conversations and afterwards, at home I listened to them and typed them up on my computer. Then, I organized the different events according to the date and I put one memory on each page.

Then the fun part: trying to find pictures from a 21st century computer that went well with memories from the late to mid-20th century. Many times I found the perfect one, but realized later that it was too small, too big, or not quite right. In the end I found some really special pictures and put it all together, binding it all in a book. I enjoyed listening to each woman's stories and watching them make connections about their own lives and what was important to them. I also enjoyed connecting pictures of historical events with each person's stories because I enjoy learning about people's daily lives during major events. But my favorite part of the whole operation was the look on each person's face when she received the book about her life and knowing that her grandchildren and great-grandchildren would read that book and remember their ancestors.

I was not only helping them remember their childhoods, I was also preserving their memories for future generations so that each of the

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women's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren would remember and learn about their histories. It was a wonderful feeling to be able to help people remember and share their special stories, while learning about their histories and of course, writing.