

# Turning Your Family Stories into Children's Book Gold

[A Special Report](#)

**By Alyson Mead**

## Introduction

No matter where you come from, or which culture you were born into, you came into the world surrounded by stories. Your parents or guardians may have read you bedtime stories, sung you lullabies, or regaled you with tales of your own ancestry.

Our stories allow us to develop a sense of morality, deal with fear or other difficult emotions, and orient ourselves to our family, culture or clan. Our stories are the places we're free to dream. They contain our hopes, dreams and aspirations, and ultimately, they show us what we're capable of becoming.

But our stories often take a backseat when we leave home and have to assume responsibility for an adult life. At the very time we're most vulnerable, and could really use the support of our stories, they are whisked away from us.

For that reason, stories often remain the property of children. Kids are urged to find themselves among animals and fantastical creatures, and to recognize the most deeply human part of themselves in the process.

This report is about family stories, and passing the torch to another generation. So if you're a yarn-spinner at heart, pull up a chair and let's get started towards turning *your* family stories into children's book gold.

## Step 1: Gather Your Stories

Every family has stories. Since the beginning of time, our stories have connected us back to our earliest ancestors, and showed us how far we have come. Our stories also allow us to reach back through time to find our way when we feel confused or lost.

Your family may have a very colorful background, throwing parties, singing or even performing for other people. Your family may be very mild-mannered and “ordinary.” But that doesn’t mean that one’s stories will necessarily be better or more adaptable than another’s. The secret is in knowing how to listen, and what to look for in your family stories. More on that in a little bit.

If you are going to be the gatherer of your family’s stories, you will need a way to record your stories. If you are a fast writer, you can choose to write down what your subject says word for word. Or some of my clients like to buy mini-cassette recorders, which can be had for around \$30-40 with mini cassettes included. Don’t forget to buy extra batteries, because you want to make sure your subjects feel free to talk as much as they like!

## Step 2: Understand Your Oral History

After you have recorded your family stories, you will need to take the second crucial step towards turning them into children's book gold.

The oral history is the record of humanity, from its humble beginnings through the present day. When you're thinking about how you will turn your family stories into one or more children's books, it helps to understand how this process has worked over the years.

*Many* cultures have figures that were often spiritual as well as cultural leaders. These people kept the tribe's stories. In this day and age, you may be the keeper of your family's stories.

Listen to the stories you have collected so far and ask yourself:

- What part of the stories you have heard make you feel connected to other people?
- What part of your oral history has a universal message?

### Step 3: Turn it Into Text

After you have listened to the stories you have collected so far, and begun to think about the questions on the previous page, it's time to turn what you have into text, so you can begin to turn what you have into one or more children's books.

If you have recorded the stories on tape, you will need to transcribe them into a word processing document, or have someone else do this for you.

Transcribing is sometimes tedious work. Unless you are a very fast typist, you will need to rewind the tape several times in order to get each phrase down perfectly. You want to make sure you've captured not only the plot of the stories, but its characters and the word choices your subject may have used. So even if it takes a long time, make sure to listen carefully to what you have on tape.

If you're a terrible typist, don't worry about it. Most people aren't that great at typing. It's very easy to hire someone to transcribe your tapes for you.

On sites like [Elance.com](http://Elance.com) or [Craigslist.org](http://Craigslist.org), you can post an ad for a transcriber, at a price you can afford.

## Step 4: Evaluate Your Stories

So far, you've recorded your family stories, contacted your unique oral history, and turned your stories into text. Now it's time to evaluate what you have, and see what can be turned into children's book gold.

First, try reading the stories aloud to yourself. Your own voice is a great help when trying to evaluate a story.

- Is the story easy to read, or do you trip over some of the words?
- Does the story seem to flow naturally from one point to the next, or does it jump all over the place in a confusing manner?
- Do you get a three-dimensional sense of the story's characters, as well as its sense of place?

Keep the parts of your stories that seem to fall into these categories, and put the rest aside for now.

## Step 5: Who Are You Trying to Reach?

Once you have thoroughly evaluated the stories you've recorded, it's time to begin envisioning your story or stories as a book for children.

This process begins by pre-determining the audience you're trying to reach, as specifically as you can right now. In time, you may decide to change your mind. But going in, it's best to know how you will "speak" to the kids you want to reach.

Children go through almost as many growing and learning stages as they do shoe sizes. If you have kids of your own, or have been around kids for any length of time, what may strike you first is how quickly they change. Bering that in mind as you construct your first children's book may help you stay "in the minds" of the children comprising your audience.

Today, spend some time in the children's section of a bookstore or library. Notice how the kids play with the books as much as look at the pictures, or read them. See which books children respond to, and try to figure out why. See if any of these books are like the story you want to tell.

## Step 6: Think Big: Movies, Tie-Ins & Consumer Products

Now that you have a clearer idea of who you're trying to reach, and the various types of children's books currently on the market, it's time to think about other markets your stories might be able to reach.

Most of us think of movie stars, singers and models as having a lot of money. But no one ever got rich doing just one thing. Bob Dylan, along with most other performers, has tours and records. Jennifer Lopez sells perfume, clothing, and shoes, in addition to money made from her successful recording and acting careers. Other performers have entirely "hidden" income that comes from performing in foreign television commercials.

If you want to make serious gold from your family stories, it behooves you to think big. Movies, tie-ins and consumer products are what really drive the market. Children's books will always be in demand, as long as there are children being born each year. But often, children become so enamored of a particular character, such as Barney or Pokemon, that they want to see the movie, buy the toy, and sleep on the sheets.

Could your family stories create a line of consumer products, or even a movie? Give it some thought, and make notes so you don't forget what you've discovered.

## Step 7: Don't Forget Schools, Libraries & Discount Outlets

Most people think that the majority of an author's money is made from sales of books at bookstores such as Barnes & Noble, or through online stores like Amazon.com. But that's often not the case.

Since books are expensive, and somewhat of a luxury for many families that have children of many different ages in the house, they may choose to borrow the book from a library, or try to order it from a book club at school.

Schools often sell books as part of these book clubs, and offer prices that are less expensive as a result. Kids bring home flyers or min-catalogues that have their own ordering coupons attached. Sometimes, this is also done online.

Librarians have their own way of becoming aware of the books that are released, usually through trade journals. As a writer, you will generally not have to approach these journals yourself. But suffice it to say that before starting out with your book, it's important to spend some time thinking like a teacher, a school administrator or even a librarian. As with editors and agents, the easier you can make their job, the easier it is for them to buy or recommend your book.

How could your family stories fit into school programs, or be used by a librarian? Spend some time thinking about how your stories might mesh with their needs, at their jobs.

## Conclusion

If you have begun the journey of collecting your family's stories, congratulations! This is an incredibly rewarding journey that can bring you closer to your relatives, and make you some serious money, if you know how to navigate through the world of children's publishing.

My last piece of advice is to take your time. Almost all of my clients want to rush through the process in order to get to the "finish line," whatever that is. The process is to be savored, with the respect your family stories deserve. Great storytellers seldom care about time. Rather, they make it all right for us to exist outside time, where our dreams can more assuredly come true.

## About the Author

Alyson Mead has been a ghostwriter and editor for 18 years, working for companies such as Scholastic, Macmillan, McGraw-Hill, Silver, Burdett & Ginn, Glencoe and others. Her fiction, essays and articles have appeared in over thirty publications, including *Salon*, *In These Times*, *BUST*, *Whole Life Times*, *Punk Planet*, *MS/NBC*, *The Sun*, *AOL*, *LA Tribe*, *Rockpile*, *IRT*, *ChickClick*, *Tapestry*, *The Stylus*, and the *New York Daily News*, among others.

She is the author of *Wake Up to Your Stories: Using the Art of Personal Narrative to Heal Your Past, Nurture Your Relationships & Ask for What You're Worth*, and has received the Columbine Award for Screenwriting, the Roy W. Dean Filmmaking Grant, and a *Writer's Digest* Award.

Her experience in publishing helped her found a revolutionary new online coaching program, [How to Write a Book, Build a Platform and Become an Expert](#), for anyone who wants to receive her expert advice for a fraction of the regular price. Please go to <http://www.CoachMyBook.com> for more information.