

Leave the Light On

A Story Preservation Workbook

Why this exists

Important stories are often carried in memory until details begin to fade. This workbook helps preserve the people, places, choices, and ordinary acts of care that shaped a life - without turning private experience into public property.

Who it is for

Individuals, families, foster and adoptive families, elders, caregivers, community historians, and anyone entrusted with another person's memories.

Your meaningful next step

Choose one person or place. Record one memory today before trying to tell an entire life.

See. Care. Act. Repeat.

Begin with care

Story preservation is an act of listening. The goal is not to force a complete account, settle every disagreement, or create a polished public narrative. The goal is to make room for what a person chooses to remember and share.

Before you begin

- [] Ask permission before recording, photographing, scanning, or sharing.
- [] Let the storyteller skip any question or stop at any time.
- [] Distinguish what was witnessed from what was heard later.
- [] Do not pressure anyone to revisit trauma for the sake of completeness.
- [] Decide where the material will be stored and who may access it.

A simple opening

You might say: 'I would like to preserve some of the people and moments that mattered to you. We can begin wherever you want, and nothing has to be shared beyond the people you choose.'

My purpose for preserving this story

The people who left a light on

List people whose steady presence, welcome, instruction, humor, courage, or practical help shaped the story. Include ordinary people, not only formal leaders.

Person 1

Name and relationship:

What did this person repeatedly do?

A phrase, habit, or detail I do not want forgotten:

Person 2

Name and relationship:

What did this person make possible?

Places that held the story

A house, porch, kitchen, school, church, workshop, street, hospital room, or vehicle can hold memory. Describe the place through physical details before interpreting what it meant.

Place name or address

What could someone see, hear, smell, or touch there?

What usually happened there?

Why does this place matter now?

Memory timeline

Use approximate dates when exact dates are unknown. Write 'about' or 'I believe' rather than turning uncertainty into fact.

Time or age	What happened	People and place	Source or certainty

Photographs and documents

Do not write on irreplaceable originals. Record what is known, what is uncertain, and who supplied the identification.

Item	Date/place	People or meaning	Owner/location

Digitizing checklist

- ☐ Scan or photograph both sides.
- ☐ Use a descriptive filename with an approximate date.
- ☐ Keep an untouched master copy and a separate working copy.
- ☐ Back up files in two different locations.
- ☐ Record ownership and permission before publishing.

Permission and privacy

Possessing a photograph or story does not automatically mean it should be published. Consent can be limited by audience, format, duration, or subject.

Sharing decision

- ☐ Private - for me only
- ☐ Family or named group only
- ☐ May be used in a private gathering
- ☐ May be quoted or displayed publicly with credit
- ☐ May be shared anonymously
- ☐ Permission not yet decided

Names or details to protect

Who may receive a copy?

Permission notes and date

A story in one page

Use this page to preserve one complete memory. Begin with what happened, include one concrete detail, and end with why it still matters.

Title

The people and place

What happened

What I understand differently now

Carry it forward

A preserved story becomes meaningful when it helps someone remember, understand, thank, repair, teach, or act. Choose a next step that respects the storyteller.

- ☐ Give a copy to someone named in the story.
- ☐ Label and safely store one photograph.
- ☐ Record a follow-up conversation.
- ☐ Write a thank-you note.
- ☐ Preserve a recipe, saying, tradition, or practical skill.
- ☐ Invite one person to leave a light on through an achievable act of care.

The next story I will preserve

**Someone left a light on.
Who will leave one on next?**