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SMARTEN-UP  
@ The South Orange-Maplewood Adult School

### **SAVING & SHARING YOUR FAMILY STORIES**

"To survive, you must tell stories," declared the late Italian writer, Umberto Eco.

Alli Joseph might put it another way. The Maplewood writer, producer, former model, and non-fiction author is out to make sure the stories themselves survive -- specifically, family stories, the kind we all have, all treasure, and want to pass along to the next generations.

Learn how to accomplish just that next Thursday evening (Mar. 10) when Alli shares her expertise at "Saving Your Family Stories," a one-night class offered by the South Orange-Maplewood Adult School ([somadultschool.org](http://somadultschool.org)).

A personal/family historian, she is the creative force behind *Seventh Generation Stories*, the remarkable business that emerged from a personal sadness: her mother died of cancer while Alli was expecting her first child, Lola Jane, now an eight-year-old attending Tuscan School..

"My mother was the family historian," Alli explains. Also, a teacher, an activist, a civil rights advocate, "she always encouraged me to care about our family legacy.

But in my 20s and 30s, I was unconcerned. I didn't know the social consequences of not taking down those family stories."

Alli says she spent the year her mother was dying "desperately trying to capture her thoughts, voice, and face on different media.... I felt cheated: my daughter would not have Grandma Bobbie's wonderful stories at her fingertips, and I knew this could have been avoided. It is my greatest regret."

Out of her own grief, "a light bulb went off," the Vassar graduate reports.

All her previous experience as a journalist -- she has covered the Republican Primary, Democratic National Conventions, Sundance Film Festival, and the Oscars -- and as a writer for the likes of the *NY Daily News*, *Miami Herald*, *Playboy*, *People Magazine*, *Car & Driver*, *Road & Track*, and *The New York Post* -- galvanized into a new career.

*Seventh Generation Stories* was named for the Native American conservation philosophy whose origins are found in the great Iroquois Confederacy -- Alli counts Shinnecock Indian in her heritage, which also includes English, Irish, African American, and Jewish forebears.

"The '*Seventh Generation*' idea suggests that everything we do affects the next seven generations, and thus we should govern ourselves in a manner that will preserve all things for them - including their historical legacy," Alli explains.

Her inspiration may be ages-old, but Alli uses the latest technologies and what she calls "fresh, first-generation thinking" to help save family stories. *Seventh Generation Stories* is built on interviews with central characters, family members, home movies, videos, even 8 mm films, scrapbooks/family albums, whatever archival material is available.

It adds up to a process that differs from a genealogist's, she points out. "Genealogists deal with the dead. I'm involved with the living."

Got an attic full of your own family memories? Bring a few to the Mar. 10 session, including family photos, a legal pad or laptop for note taking, and a story to share. Alli will lead an exercise designed to take you through the process of saving your family history. Students will leave the 90-minute class, she promises, with "a firm idea of how to develop a story arc, and the beginnings of your own family history."

Doing it on your own? In that case, Alli advises, "Sleep with a digital audio recorder (a "tape" recorder) by your bed. Sleep brings out thoughts and memories, the 'gold nuggets' of memories you won't remember the next day."

What about an old-fashioned notepad and pen? "Even if you wake up and write down your thoughts, you probably can't read them the next day," Alli warns.

Her advice bears weight. Alli's work as a journalist helped earn her a McCormick Tribune Foundation fellowship and a Poynter Institute fellowship. She has also been on the board of the Radio and Television News Directors Association, representing Native American journalists, and the board of the American Indian Community House.

Add her busy family life -- now including 4-year-old Julian-- and it's easy to see why Alli has asked her husband Larry to sum up her own personal history with the epitaph "Never Bored!" *And don't forget the exclamation point.*

***By Rose Bennett Gilbert***

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