

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Book helps jog memories

By Lou Panarale
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — In a very real sense, *The Story of a Lifetime: A Keepsake of Personal Memories*, is a book in search of a new author, which is exactly what its original authors had in mind.

Pamela and Stephen Pavuk put together *The Story of a Lifetime* as a guide to help others write that personal book they have been meaning to write all these years.

In all, there are 500 questions designed to help readers jog their memories by describing in the provided spaces the feelings they have about themselves and their loved ones. Questions in the 384-page hardback book include:

- "What interests did your mother have? What were her hobbies and what did she do for fun?"
- "What is your most painful memory as a teenager?"
- "What is the most important thing you want your family to know about you?"
- "What was your first year of marriage like?"
- "What have you feared that has kept you from doing all that you wanted to do?"

The Pavuks suggest that if some questions seem too painful to answer, the reader can skip them and move on. They say there is no right or wrong way to answer any question, except to approach each one with all the honesty they can muster.

What motivated them to write the book — the first place dates back to the summer of 1993, when Pam Pavuk's 82-year-old father and 77-year-old mother came for a visit.

Pam saw how her father, who had been a minister for over 50 years, had become blind and enfeebled in his retirement years, and was quite dependent on her

mother.

During their visit, her mother fell and broke her hip and needed emergency hip replacement surgery. She recuperated at the Pavuks' home for two weeks and, despite the trauma, tried to keep up with her husband's needs, reading to him every day and helping him get through each meal.

For his part, Pam's dad would feel his way around the room to bring his wife her medicine and stay at her bedside to comfort her.

"We got to see how the two of them cared for each other in a very special way after almost 60 years of marriage," Stephen Pavuk said in a telephone interview with Catholic News Service from the couple's home in Santa Fe, N.M.

When Pam realized her parents would not be with her much longer, she decided to learn more about them before it was too late.

Around November 1993, she began to put together a list of questions for her parents to answer, questions about their youth, about raising children and about growing old.

"It dawned on me that I could show them how important they were to me by asking, in writing, every question I had about their lives," she told CNS.

Her plan was to put their written answers in a bound volume and present it to them as a present on Christmas.

She was down to the last few questions when she received a phone call from her mother telling her that her father had died.

"I was devastated with grief and riddled with guilt and anger at myself," she said. "I waited too long. I assumed I had plenty of time. Now he would never know how much I loved him."



Linda Jeanne Rivers

She said one of her fondest hopes is that people who read *The Story of a Lifetime* do not wait until it is too late.

"Preserving your personal remembrances of your family helps you better appreciate their lives and understand them as human beings," she said.

There are 17 sections, ranging from family background, education, work and career, marriage and parenthood to the golden years, regrets and turning points, lessons and advice and what life is like now. Each section opens with an illustra-

tion and a short narrative about the topic. There is a section to record your family tree and save family photos and mementos.

The Pavuks say one of their greatest satisfactions is to hear from readers who credit the book with helping them discover who they are and what their families mean to them.

The Story of a Lifetime, which sells for \$39.95 plus \$5.95 shipping and handling, was published by TriAngel Publishers at (800) 579-1869.

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