



## DOING HISTORY: BECOME YOUR OWN CURATOR

Each of us is an historical being, for without memory we would have no identity. We carry our histories with us as registered by our names, our skin, our preferences for a style, and certainly our cell phones, which hold our history of contacts and chronicle our conversations, searches, photographs, texts, and attachments we have not yet deleted.

Similarly, our dwellings, however sparse or luxuriant, are documents as much of our pasts as of current circumstances. Each of us is already a curator of a museum, if only the corner of a shared room or a shopping cart.

If you look at each item in your museum as its curator, then you would

1) describe its Provenance.

Where did it come from, when, and especially how? Behind each of our most personally significant possessions there is a story, sometimes serious, sometimes hilarious--or there is a mystery that intrigues, that makes you wonder. Recording your accounts of those objects that you like to keep beside you, that would be a valuable contribution to your own archive, as well as to any who may inherit those objects.

2) document its Condition.

Does it have tears, breaks, spots, missing pieces that also remind you of a story, perhaps of a move from one place to another, or of a person, an event, a particular place? Why have you repaired some things and left others with their dents or dust?

3) put it in Context.

How do the objects in your museum relate to one another? Do they come from the same era in your life? Do they anchor your own biography, each representing a different era or pivot point in your life? Are they a cache of memories related to parents, grandparents, more distant ancestors? Do they signal friendships maintained, lost, regained? Periods of economic scarcity or abundance? More stories.

4) explain its Value.

This is not about what an object would fetch at auction, but what it means to you: Why do you keep it around? Why do you have some objects on display and others squirreled away? Why do you make sure that some things are in reach? Why do you hold on to others but keep them in boxes that have been taped up for decades?

Of course, doing this for each greeting card you have saved, each school notebook, childhood drawing, favorite book or album, a jackknife or vase that perfectly fits your hand, a broken pair of eyeglasses, that would be exhausting. Curators must always make choices about what to keep, what to display. Their choices are themselves conditioned by the times they are living through. Whenever and wherever you are, doing history is never simply an act of retrospection. It is an act of circumspection, of attempting to think all the way around an artifact, manuscript, remnant of sound. And whatever we do by way of doing history is also a gift to those who come after, who need our stories to round out their own.

If you want to know more and do more, join us at the Encinitas Historical Society. Call (760) 942-9066, email [info@encinitashistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@encinitashistoricalsociety.org), or visit us at the 1883 Schoolhouse, 390 West F Street, Saturdays 10-3. We are eager for new members.