

COMMENTARY

GUEST COMMENTARY

Join our effort to preserve 'slices' of our history while we can

By **ELAINE L. REED**

Executive director,
Naples Historical Society

Tom Brokaw's superb book, "The Greatest Generation," certainly was a winner with many in the nation and around the world when it was published in 1998. Not only was that writing captivating, it catapulted an often overlooked, and yet simple, idea of saving memories into a household conversation piece.

Was the release of this book the first or biggest event to have such an impact on holding onto our history? Of course not, but it handsomely represented the notion of preserving personal histories and, I will add, gaining an understanding for the buildings and locales in which those memories were made.

As Naples has grown over the last few decades, and as its residents have aged gracefully, many having passed, the activities surrounding the preser-

vation of Naples history and heritage remains a vital endeavor to bridge the past with the future.



Reed

There is increased conversation regarding local history these days, and I believe that this heightened level of attention to preserving Naples' vibrant history is based not only on Collier County or Naples resident composition, but also stems from what Brokaw's book symbolized: a reminder to capture the story, the "slices of life," and understand it before it really is too late.

Maria Stone, a beloved caretaker of Collier County history, passed away peacefully on Feb. 14. Her dedication to preserving this community's history is demonstrated, in part, by the many books she has published.

Stone's passing is yet one more re-

minder that we need to capture vital histories before it is too late.

According to U.S. Bureau of the Census, "By the year 2010, the growth rate of the older population (60-plus) will be 3½ times as high as that of the total population, and the growth rate of the 75-and-over segment will be accelerating."

Many baby boomers (and I fall on the cusp) have experienced or feel the impending loss of our parents, all from a wonderful generation. When my own father passed away, I was compelled to collect a family tree from my mother to learn more about my extended relatives. Do you have their phone numbers? I asked.

The Naples Historical Society's mission is to preserve Naples history and heritage for the community and future generations to enjoy. The task of preserving our past for the future continues in the form of preservation initiatives that range from informa-

tion-packed educational tours in the Palm Cottage house museum (Naples' oldest house, built in 1895, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places), to our popular walking tours of the Naples Historic District, to our A-rated children's educational program, Pupils at Palm Cottage, and through our boldest preservation initiative yet, "Naples Oral Histories: If These Walls Could Talk!"

The latter is a major project that revitalizes the efforts from the society's past. Essentially, the project is based on filming in broadcast-quality high-definition oral history interviews that depict "slices of life" from those (or family members of those) who contributed to the development of Naples over the early years. It, like many other activities surrounding preservation, will be a long-term, communitywide effort, and we are fortunate that so many share the belief to preserve memories. (We are fortunate that we were able to capture

Stone's slices of life on Oct. 31.)

My father, a World War II veteran decorated with the Silver Star and Purple Heart, read "The Greatest Generation" but died in 1999 after a full life. His slices of life abound — in my mind and in that of my siblings' minds and in full color with my dear mother. Unless they are captured for posterity and we share in the telling of his story — their story — it could be lost. We won't let that happen.

And I believe this community won't as well, whether for the personal story of a family member or for the preservation of Naples history and heritage, let us continue to work together to save precious memories for future great generations to enjoy.

Naples Historical Society, a 501(c)3 tax-exempt charity, is headquartered at historic Palm Cottage, 137 12th Ave. S., one block east of the Naples Pier. For more information, call 261-8164 or visit www.NaplesHistoricalSociety.org.