

Omholt remembers those days while sitting in his office in his imposing white stucco home in West Chester, Pa., which overlooks a pond and a wooded valley that is home to "12 deer, two geese, and three muskrats." He radiates calm and good humor, and plenty of that old Viking zest; the aneurysm may have made off with part of his memory, but it sent him on a quest that led directly to a new life with Inka, his wife of 10 years, and a newly-created business venture, Legacy Profiles, Incorporated.

The purpose of Legacy Profiles is to help its customers recapture their lives' positive memories and experiences, and to preserve them in archival-quality books which can be shared with present loved ones and future generations.

The process relies on memory-support software that Omholt developed during his recovery in order to re-build his memory. He had never designed software before, but it seemed only logical.

"Computers have everything to do with memory," he says. "A computer has almost zero capability of thinking. But it has an exquisite memory."

He began by organizing his life into memory-support files in his computer. Every person he encountered during his daily rounds, every friend or business contact he spoke to on the phone got his or her own file which included the date and time of the contact, the topics discussed, and a subjective feelings comment. Omholt still maintains these memory-support files in his computer and now has more than 23,000 such files.

"That's a lot of work," he admits. "It's an immense amount of discipline to design a system where you can, within three or four seconds, pull up a person's file."

The system Omholt designed to organize and store his own memories had, at first, strictly personal applications. His financial survival was at stake; as the owner of a national business, he could not let illness or memory loss dull his competitive edge, or hamper him in the ego-driven, adversarial world of the courtroom.

The near-death experience, however, had affected not only his career, but his whole approach to life. As he recovered, he threw himself into research that helped him discover how memory worked and enabled him to form authentic

friendships and strengthen his relationships with his children. This included courses in personal development and relationship training—he met Inka in one of these—and involvement in a number of social, spiritual and political groups.

Among the insights gleaned from this transformational period in his life was this, from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "All people are entitled to be valued by their best moments."

Another bout of illness, in December 2005, kept him in bed for several months, and led to yet another career, one inspired by that Emersonian ideal.

"This was the time for me to change my life," he realized.

"I said, I'm going to stop being an engineer now. I've got about 2,000 hours of programming experience so far, so I'm going to convert it, and drive it forward, into what will eventually be called Legacy Profiles."

The Legacy Profiles process uses Omholt's memory-retrieval software to collect, sort and store a client's memories from several stages in life, from childhood to the "philosophical years" (55-plus). During at least five three-hour interview sessions, held in a cheerful and comfortable interview room in the Omholt house, the client is guided by one of four trained "facilitators." During interviews, the client looks at his own screen and can see his words as they are entered into his database to assure accuracy and to permit additional comments the client might want to insert to extend the memory being entered.

Dr. Daniel Gottlieb, an author and psychologist, calls the whole process a "journey," and indeed it is; led back into the past by the facilitator, clients can uncover remarkable memories. One remembered a childhood sickball game in detail, down to his watching grandfather's shirt and his admiring comments about one boy's playing skills.

Omholt emphasizes that only positive memories are elicited, including such events as family holiday traditions and notable vacations. Unhappy experiences are recorded only if they led to affirmative life changes.

"We don't do negative memories, because their power is so great that they obliterate the faint positive memories, which are all in there. It's sort of like trying to see the stars when you're walking on the boardwalk.

"You put together a person's life as they talk, all happy memories, and then they are able to see something they've never seen before," he says, "themselves, in a positive light."

"I've always felt very grateful for many of the things that happened in my life," offers Arthur Strube, a retired IBM executive who was Omholt's first Legacy Profiles subject. "When you feel grateful about something, there is often someone else involved. All of a sudden, all the people who helped me when I was struggling with what to do next popped into mind. I recalled their faces, their names, conversations I had that helped steer me."

"Your mind is a search engine," comments Omholt. Remember the "African Queen"? It didn't go very fast, but no one could stop it! That's like human memory. You have to eliminate all kinds of places that it *could* go, and steer it pretty much where you *want* it to go."

Eventually this jumble of memories comes together into a well-rounded portrait of the subject, much like—in another favorite metaphor—a thousand-piece puzzle.

Omholt said the cost of a Legacy Profile is tied to the level of satisfaction of the client, the number of sessions the client decides he or she wants. Because of the customized nature of a Legacy Profile, cost estimates are available on request. Legacy Profiles is targeted largely at retirees and "baby boomers", with a potential focus on individuals in the early stages of dementia.

Middle-aged people can also benefit from the process, Omholt says. Their memories are an excellent way for them to bond with and to guide their growing children. It can be of immeasurable value for a teenager, he says, to learn that his stern CEO dad was once a fun-loving kid in a fifth-floor walk-up.

Strube, who is battling cancer, especially values the spiritual dimension of his Legacy Profile and the way it allows subjects to take stock of their lives and their personal legacies, and to pass on their deepest values and hard-won wisdom.

"I think it's very important that we leave some message and story behind," he says. "As I looked back after I saw my summary, I said, 'Man, that was a great life!'"