

MY PERSONAL DISASTER PLAN

By Randy Seaver © 2006

Are you prepared for a personal data disaster? What will happen to your precious mementoes, heirlooms, documents, certificates, pictures, movies, videos, and genealogy databases if a disaster happens to you?

Will your genealogy research survive a computer hard drive crash, a theft of your whole computer system, a fire, earthquake, landslide, flood, or a nuclear catastrophe? What about your death?

I've read quite a bit about this issue, listened to the computer guys on the radio, considered my own situation, and have formulated my own plan. Here it is:

- 1) Inventory the family documents, mementoes, heirlooms, etc, including their origin, general description and physical location. Keep these items in a safe, dark, dry, cool place in archival holders.
- 2) Scan the original documents and save the digital images on the computer. Make Xerox copies of the original documents and provide them to family members for safe-keeping. Keep the original documents in a safe, dark, dry, cool place in archival holders.
- 3) Scan family photographs and save the digital images on the computer. Organize the photographs into family groups, and give them descriptive names with dates, if possible. Label the original photographs. Keep the original photographs in a safe, dark, dry, cool place in archival holders.
- 4) Backup my computer hard drive data regularly in order to protect against a hard drive or system failure. An external hard drive with many gigabytes is relatively cheap, it is portable to another computer, and it is easy to copy data from the computer hard drive to the external drive. I don't need to copy all computer files – only the precious data files that I cannot replace easily (e.g., databases, documents, photos, financial records, etc). This can be done daily, weekly, monthly, yearly – how much am I willing to lose? I tend to do it monthly.
- 5) In order to circumvent a theft, fire, flood, earthquake, etc., copy my precious data files on to CD-ROM's on a regular basis. Then store these CD-ROM's at places away from my home (e.g., at work, a safety deposit box, with a friend or relative, etc).
- 6) In order to circumvent the nuclear catastrophe or my own demise, make and send CD-ROM's with my precious data files to family or friends far from my home town.

- 7) My death is inevitable. In order to ensure that my precious family data is saved and used, write a genealogical will telling what I would like done with the mementos, heirlooms, papers, documents, photos, etc. Include directions to either publish my research as is or to use your research to complete genealogy books. Define the books in detail, and the repositories where I wish them placed. If I want to contribute a genealogy database to an online repository (e.g. Rootsweb), specify what I want submitted. Appoint an heir to find, inventory, update, improve, keep, publish or donate my material to a repository. Leave a significant bequest to an heir to perform these tasks, or to have it done professionally. This is my life's work.

I recommend a fireproof safe for things kept at the house, stored in a closet away from the computer room. For real precious documents or heirlooms, a safe deposit box at a bank is recommended.

The lifetime of a CD-ROM is anywhere from 2 years to 20 years, according to the computer people. Plan accordingly. As DVD writers become readily available, more precious data will be able to be stored on DVDs with a longer shelf life.

That's my plan, and I've talked to my family members about it. I am still working on all aspects of the plan. I have so much stuff from four generations in one family that I am behind on the archiving bit of it. I also have many more old family pictures to scan. I do the computer backup on a monthly basis, and at Christmas time I give a CD-ROM to my children and siblings with the year's photos, newly digitized documents and my updated genealogy databases.