

## This is Your Digital Life

WGN newscaster Robert Jordan has pioneered a state-of-the-art way to capture your personal and family history for generations to come. But it'll come at a premium price. *By Michael Austin*

**Emmy award-winning** newscaster Robert Jordan did a favor for a friend, and next thing he knew he had a side business — a big side business at \$80,000 a pop.

For that \$80,000 fee, Jordan will tell your life story in a feature-length documentary and deliver it to you on a high-definition DVD nestled in a walnut case. He will give you as many extra copies as you want, too, depending upon how big your brood is.

That favor more than a decade ago was for a family friend whose mother had died. Jordan, a veteran anchor/reporter on WGN Channel 9, did what he knew best.

"I went over to the house, and the kids were sitting around on the floor," says Jordan, who lives in Lincolnwood. "I took some photos, and I knew enough about her life to write a little four-minute piece about her and put it to music using some other photos they had. They were just amazed. They loved it."

Jordan wondered if there might be a larger market for such videos. Through online research he found a few people dabbling in family-history videos but nothing close to what he knew he could produce using state-of-the-art equipment and other television-industry professionals.

"Most of the people I saw on the Internet were wedding photographers, and I'm not being disparaging, but these were not journalists," Jordan says. "These were guys with cameras who would shoot weddings, but they did not have the ability to sit down and write a story."

Jordan decided to price out his potential venture. What he found was what he had feared — that long documentaries (60 to 90 minutes) would be out of reach for the average family. The ABC news program *20/20*, for example, had a weekly budget of \$400,000 — and that was for a one-hour show, which, without commercials, is only 40 minutes long.

"That's when I realized I had to narrow my target audience," Jordan says. "I knew I would be using the same kinds of producers, editors, journalists and high-definition cameras they were



using on *20/20* and traveling from place to place to shoot vacation homes and interview family members. If a person is talking about going up to Martha's Vineyard as a child, I want to show Martha's Vineyard. If they talk about skiing in Aspen, then I want to show that in the video."

Jordan, a trustee of the Shedd Aquarium, asked other members of the board if they had had family histories made. He asked if anyone had ever compiled their story (how the family began, how the wealth was acquired) or stated their philanthropic philosophies to be passed down to heirs.

"It just reaffirmed that there was a market for this because they all said, 'This is a great idea,'" Jordan says.

Last year Jordan was invited by Northern Trust Bank to make a presentation to high-net-wealth

individuals in Florida, an opportunity that has brought in new business. He does not advertise; he relies solely on positive word-of-mouth.

Don't go asking for names because all of Jordan's clients are confidential. To date, as the business marks its fifth anniversary, Jordan and Jordan has produced close to 30 family-history videos combining interviews, old photographs, on-location video, music and narration.

Right now Jordan and Jordan is run by Robert Jordan alone. Someday he hopes his daughter or son-in-law, both of whom work in television, will join him in a partnership and eventually take over the family business, creating a little legacy of their own.

For more information, call 312/330-7979 or visit <http://videofamilybiographies.com>.